University of Alberta

An Analysis and Critique of Character Education: The Special Case of *Character Counts!*

by

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ABSTRACT

The new millennium has seen character education surge in prominence as a leading form of moral education. During this time *Character Counts!* has become the preeminent North American program of character education. To date, however, little has been done in the way of critically examining this program and the possible issues that arise from its use. This study draws a critical framework with which to examine programs of moral education. It then uses this framework to evaluate *Character Counts!*. This study also engages in a thorough examination of the survey data collected by the authors of *Character Counts!*, the Josephson Institute of Ethics. It was found that *Character Counts!* neglects a large number of key features and practices indicated by the most respected theories of moral education. It was argued also that the data collected to justify the use of this program do not contribute meaningfully to its defense.

To my mother and father. Thank You.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This work will investigate *Character Counts!,* a prominent character education program produced by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (Josephson Institute, 2006c). Character education is, as I shall argue subsequently, a member of a broader spectrum of programs in moral education. As character education itself is becoming more and more influential, studies of character education become more and more relevant. The need for critical information with which to make pedagogical decisions about character education motivates a body of literature examining programs like *Character Counts!*. This contribution will survey the writing of an eclectic group of moral education scholars and social theorists to identify a list, or framework, of positive practices and characteristics for moral education programs. This framework will then be used to examine *Character Counts!*. In addition to examining the program itself, this work will also engage in an examination of the research used to justify and guide this program. The two questions, then, that will guide this inquiry are: do the research methods and conclusions of the Josephson Institute justify the use of their program, and does *Character Counts!* embody the positive practices and characteristics identified by moral education scholars.

The first question grew out of the realization that any examination of the nature of *Character Counts!* would require an examination of the way the Josephson Institute gathers the data that informs its practice. Thus an analysis of the data collection practices of the Josephson Institute has been included. It was found that the way the Josephson data were collected connected on several levels with the nature of the program itself. Thus, the conclusions made at the end of this document will include reference to several levels of the work done in and around *Character Counts!*. These levels will include the research methods, philosophy, worldview, and pedagogical techniques of the Josephson Institute.

The second question will yield more direct insight into whether or not teachers ought to use *Character Counts!*. This question is a professional one and as such will draw on philosophic, pedagogical and methodological critiques to come to a single judgment about this program. It will also aid in the bridging of the gap between moral education scholarship and the practice of educators. To foster such bridging numerous highly pragmatic concerns will be examined including, but not restricted to, the methods required to teach the material, the possible reactions of students, and the feasibility of the expectations held by the authors of this program.

The two questions of this inquiry will also illuminate the general nature of character education itself. The worldview and philosophy of character education are clearly discernable within the practices advocated in *Character Counts!*. In this way this work will serve as a bridge not only between scholarship and teaching, but also between the general nature of character education and its specific application in *Character Counts!*.

This enterprise will begin, in chapter two, with a description of the general nature of character education. This description will include a discussion of its philosophy, worldview, practices, and influence. Once this description is complete I will move into an examination of the common criticisms made of character education. This survey of the landscape of character education will conclude with a description of *Character Counts!* itself, and the criticisms made of this program in particular.

From here I will move into a survey of current discourses in moral education. This explanation will serve two overarching purposes. First, it will situate character education as a category of moral education. In other words, it will demonstrate that character education is but one answer to the question of how moral development ought to be fostered in formal schooling. Second, the survey of moral education will outline the various alternatives to character education. These will be grouped into five categories which, while not exhaustive, serve as an effective summary of the main branches of moral education. These categories will be: the justice reasoning approach, the values clarification approach, the caring approach, the citizenship approach, and the spiritual-religious approach.

From this broad survey I will focus on a group of theorists and scholars that contribute particularly useful insight to my discussion of moral education. This group is composed of prominent scholars in moral education, as well as several scholars who would not be considered moral educators. From this group I will draw a series of positive characteristics and practices in moral education that will form a critical framework which I will use to examine *Character Counts!*. Once this critical framework has been established I will engage in a discussion of where this work fits into the broader discourses of moral education and what it contributes to them. This discussion will conclude the second chapter.

In the third chapter I will describe in detail the methods of this analysis. This examination will include a discussion of the use of the critical framework, the methods used in examining the Josephson Institute's research, the form the results will take, and a rationale for the various choices made in designing this inquiry. This chapter will also discuss the connection between the two main questions of this thesis and the methods used to answer them.

The fourth chapter will include an analysis and critique of the Josephson Institute's research and the program they have authored, *Character Counts!*. This will include a step by step analysis of the institute's main research instrument, a mass opinion survey, and an in-depth analysis of a set of lesson plans from *Character Counts!*. Following this analysis, in the fifth and final chapter, will be a discussion of the results and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will set the stage for the contributions this inquiry will make to moral education. It will begin with an examination of the key terms that will be used throughout this work. Following this will be an analysis of what exactly is meant by the term 'character education'. This description of character education will include an examination of the underlying philosophy, pedagogical techniques, worldview, and political influence of character educators, as well as brief reference to its historic origins. This examination will lead into a discussion of the nature of *Character Counts!* as a specific program of character education. This more specific discussion will not only describe *Character Counts!*, but it will also draw connections between this program and character education so as to demonstrate to the reader the way in which such general philosophies of education become manifest in concrete practices.

Once both character education and *Character Counts!* have been described, I will move into an account of the most common criticisms of both character education in general and *Character Counts!* specifically. This discussion of common criticisms will lead into a survey of the alternatives to character education. This survey will also situate character education within a broader spectrum of possible approaches to moral education. Once a clear picture of the landscape of moral education has been created, I will then select a set of positive practices and characteristics from that literature that will be used in the subsequent analysis of *Character Counts!*. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of where this inquiry fits into moral education and what it will contribute to this field.

Definition of Terms

As I discuss the various forms of moral education several terms will be used that require some brief clarification. First and foremost, I will begin with the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* which defines morality as "an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, having lessening of evil or harm as its goal." (Audi, 1999, p. 586). This definition is a useful start. Within the context of education, however, I propose two important additions. First, while this definition refers to morality as informal, many programs within moral education seek to formalize such morality to some degree. Second, this definition is phrased in the negative, referring to the lessening of harm. It is fully possible for an educational program to seek the presentation of benefit over the reduction of harm as a primary goal. I will, thus, amend this definition to include these two education-specific changes:

> Morality is a system which can be perceived as formal or informal, applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, having the lessening of harm or the presentation of benefit as its goal.

With this definition in hand I may now move to defining ethics, whose definition refers to morality. It is, put simply, "the philosophic study of morality" (Audi, 2006, p. 284). Within ethics theorists make heavy use of the terms value and virtue. Value will be defined, for the purposes of this analysis, as something viewed as positive to the speaker. A value could be an action or set of actions, a belief, or a state of relations with others or self. Virtue, on the other hand, will be defined in the way that the ancient Greek philosophers defined it. They viewed a virtue as, "a character trait that disposes a person to do what can independently be verified as morally required or to effect what is best." (Audi, 2006, p. 960). Thus a value is a notion viewed as important, whereas a virtue is a part of one's character. One may have values, for instance, that are not a virtue within their character. In explaining these terms I have inadvertently defined my last concept, character. Character, as noted above, is simply the sum of your dispositions (Audi, 2006).

It is important to note, before moving to character education, that the terms value and virtue are often conflated, to some degree, in writing in moral education. On numerous occasions in this analysis I will refer to character educators' discussing values that become a key part of a person's character and that begin to dispose that person to moral action. In the previous sentence it is essentially a virtue that is being discussed, though it is being referred to as a value that guides your action and disposes you to moral behavior. In this way character educators often name a value when they are referring to a type of virtue.

Background on Character Education

Character education is unique among approaches to moral education. Unlike many of the others that will be examined in this chapter, the notion of 'character' education has clearly defined supporters, clearly defined organizations, and in some cases clearly defined ideology. This description will begin with an explanation of the influence that character education wields. I will then move on to an explanation of the worldview common to character educators, and the historicity of that worldview. This discussion will lead to a discussion of the way character educators seek to build character through instruction in values claimed to be universal. This approach is the defining feature of character education. Once character education has been described I will conclude this subsection with a discussion of its historic roots.

Among the approaches I have surveyed character education is the most influential (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). Indeed, it is so successful (particularly in the contemporary United States) that the term character education is often conflated with the term moral education (Yu, 2004). Former President Clinton, for instance, seemingly equated the two in a speech supporting character education (Yu, 2004). As will be demonstrated in this analysis, however, character education is just one of many answers to the question of what ought be taught to students with regards to morality.

Discussions of character education, especially critical ones, invariably return to the worldview that underpins it. It is important, then, to begin with an examination of where this approach comes from socio-politically. Arthur explains that character education is generally presented as a solution to a long list of social issues (2003). These issues, according to Arthur, are generally some combination of teen pregnancy, sexual activity outside of marriage, sexual abuse, theft, suicide and substance abuse (Arthur, 2003). Character educators Deroche and Williams, for example, make the following claims:

> The public feels there is a state of moral decline because they have witnessed well documented "snapshots" over the past two decades of a range of social ills, including dysfunctional families, drug use and abuse, irresponsible sexual behavior, out of wedlock pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, high school dropouts, family violence, in-school violence, child abuse, juvenile deaths from suicide and homicide, an emphasis on sex and violence on television and in movies, music with distasteful lyrics, the rise of vandalism, stealing, cheating, the apparent lack of role models (a confusion between heroes and celebrities), and a general sense that many of our youth have lost qualities of civility, respect, and responsibility (to say nothing about adults who lack these traits). (DeRoche & Williams, 2001b, p.2)

Wrynne, a more moderate character educator, espouses a more tempered list including, "rising rates of youth suicide, homicide, out-of-wedlock births, criminal arrest, and drug abuse." (Wrynne, 1991, p.139). Thomas Lickona, the preeminent character education advocate, uses a similar list including dishonesty, lack of respect for adults, poor work ethic, and poor language skills (1996). It is important to note that in these cases the issues focus very heavily on youth (specifically teenagers) as the cornerstone of immoral social trends. Character educators see these lists of ills as contributing to a worsening of moral society. As an excellent example of this view Lickona goes on to say that the basic moral fiber of society is actually decaying (1996). This view of society is one that seems to ring true in the eyes of many Americans. Indeed, Duffet, Johnson and Farkas found that such negative views of adolescents are actually very common (1999). This suspicion of teenagers as being the root of social ills is a very seductive one for adults in positions of authority. Whether or not this is philosophically or empirically true is outside the bounds of this inquiry. It is important, however, to note that character education grows out of a list of social ills that are tightly related to suspicion of young people.

It is useful, for a moment, to step back and ask where such suspicions come from. First and foremost one must recognize that they are by no means new concerns, nor are they isolated to the United States. Such claims are recorded as far back as the time of Plato (Bloom, 1991). Speaking in a historic sense, character educators in North America have been saying much the same thing since the beginning of the 20th century (Yu, 2004). McKown, for instance, warned of dramatic increases in crime as far back as 1935 (McKown, 1935). His warnings look much like the contemporary lists of social problems espoused by modern character educators. What is interesting about these claims is that they are based on an interpretation of social problems that focuses on individual agency (Yu, 2004). In 1909, for instance, White warned that the moral issues of the day required more individual morality rather than state action (White, 1909). Within this thinking issues like theft are not entirely a social problem. They are less a reflection of poverty, marginalization or a culture of inequality and more a reflection of a lack of good character. The implication is that people generally choose, and are not forced into, criminal action. Character educators tend to downplay the contextual causes of crime and emphasize individual decision-making. DeRoche and Williams, for example, tie their list of social issues to the claim that American culture is not flawed but is simply not rigorously applied (2001b). In other words, the problem is not with America, it is with America not firmly teaching what America is about. Such positions can be seen in contrast to a more progressive stance that would divide responsibility more evenly between individual agency and social context.

According to character educators this individual decision-making is compromised by the spread of relativism (Arthur, 2003). Since there is little in the way of universal moral codes, people define their ideals in ways that may not be moral to others. This lack of agreement makes it unlikely, in the minds of character educators, for the average person to make moral choices. Character educators Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan articulate the issue as growing out of the 1960s:

> In the sixties, with the opposition to the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and additional social tumult, moral authority was called into question. Teachers distanced themselves from students' moral development and attempted to become neutral facilitators, leaving students free to figure out life's toughest questions on their own and to view society's traditions of civility with skepticism and scorn. They were left free to arrive at their own values. This had deeply troubling results-relationships and respect eroded between adults and children, cynicism

> toward authority grew, and students were left morally adrift. (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan, 2001, p.7)

From this point of view society ought to be based on a set of shared values that are taken seriously. Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan call these values the "social glue of civic life" (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan, 2001, p.7). This emphasis on shared values tying a society together connects character education and communitarianism. The thick social order described by theorists like Lichterman bears a great deal of resemblance to the shared-value society one sees in the dreams of character education (2000). Much like communitarians, character educators warn against the danger of leaving values unaddressed. Thomas Lickona summarizes the perceived risk when he writes, "the renewal of character education in our schools – in some cases, in whole communities – is at least in part a recognition that we stand at a cultural crossroads. Either we will come together to try to solve our cultural problems or we will see social and moral regression proceed with gathering speed" (Lickona, 2004, p.29).

The best way of fostering a shared value society, as one may infer, is argued to be the practice of character education. At its most basic level character education is an approach that focuses on the inculcation of values in the hope that they will form good character (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). The values used in these programs are portrayed as "core" values that have universal relevance (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). The basic notion is that if you can teach someone to adopt certain values into their personality and help them form habits based on them, society will be more moral (Nucci, 2001).

Given that character educators view their values as universal it is interesting to note that there are disagreements between character educators as to what should be on the list of values. Stein et al. list respect, impulse control, passion, and equity (2000). Deroche and Williams list self-discipline, patriotism, responsibility, loyalty, justice, patience, compassion, tolerance, ambition, and trustworthiness (2001a). Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan organize their list using four cardinal virtues (courage, self-mastery, justice, and wisdom) as headings with related virtues listed beneath them (2001).

From the standpoint of these scholars the solution to a perceived rise in adolescent theft, for example, would be the teaching of honesty and respect for property. If a teacher taught these things the students would presumably know that stealing is wrong and cease to do so. As I will demonstrate in my analysis of *Character Counts!*, this teaching relies heavily on repetition of core values and behavior reinforcement through praise. As a result character educators are often criticized for valuing docility (Yu, 2004). This claim grows out of the notion that teaching students what is moral leaves little room for independent decision-making, and amounts to mere behavior modification.

This supposed behavior modification extends into academic activities as well, as character education is often argued to boost academic performance (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1990). Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan, for instance, argue that character education is, "crucial to both moral *and* intellectual development" (2001, p.1). DeRoche and Williams, writing to an administrative audience, make the more definitive claim that character education bolsters academic performance (2001a).

Such claims and criticisms are certainly not new. Indeed, character education has a long history. Tianlong Yu's highly comprehensive study claims that modern character education dates back as far as 1901 (2004). Yu argues that this early period of character education grew out of the uncertainty surrounding social and political changes taking place at the turn of the century. Character education did very well during this period of uncertainty, fending off criticisms by growing numbers of progressive educators until about 1928-1930 (Yu, 2004). It was then that a devastating study done by Hartshorne and May proclaimed that character education failed to accomplish its purported level of behavior modification (Hartshorne & May, 1928-1930).

Between 1928 and 1930 Hartshorne and May conducted what they called *Studies in the Nature of Character*. They used deceit as their focal point and developed dozens of measures to test deceit amongst young children. They concluded, in their three-volume account of the study, that moral behavior is highly contextual and not governed by general personality traits as character educators had claimed (Hartshorne & May, 1928-1930). What is particularly interesting about their conclusions is that they make some of the same criticisms of traditional teaching methods that are being made today nearly eighty years later. This excerpt summarizes their position well:

> It seems to be a fair conclusion from our data that honest and deceptive tendencies represent not general traits nor action guided by general ideals,

> but specific habits learned in relation to specific situations which have made the one or the other mode of response successful. For deceptive children, success has come to be defined in such a way as to encourage and permit dishonest methods for attaining it. As an illustration of how such concepts may arise, one has only to think of much parental discipline, with its emphasis on outer conformity, and of much school practice, with its emphasis on marks more than on inner growth. (Hartshorne & May, 1928-1930, vol.3, p.372)

As a result of these findings character education was seriously discredited and spent the next half-century largely dormant until another period of uncertainty began in the 1980s (Yu, 2004). Yu argues that it was then that faltering American dominance created another wave of uncertainty that propelled character education back into the forefront (2004). According to Yu's analysis, the "post-9-11" world sees character education in its most powerful position yet, enjoying support from all levels of government.

Character education, in summary, is a system based on a set of supposedly universal values. These values are to be taught to students in an effort to change their behavior and avert a moral crisis in society. Character educators view this crisis as a result of growing moral relativism and a lack of clear, communally held, values. What exactly is done to inculcate these values is best described through an analysis of a specific program of character education. To accomplish this I will now move to a description of the most common of these programs, *Character Counts!*.

Background on *Character Counts!*

This description will begin by identifying the authors of this program, the Josephson Institute of Ethics. From this point I will outline the circumstance surrounding the creation of *Character Counts!* and the declaration which guides it. Once the genesis of *Character Counts!* is clear I will discuss what exactly constitutes this program and what may be expected from the lessons contained within it. This description will flow into an account of the criticisms made of this program, and then those made of character education in general.

Character Counts! was created by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, which is a non-profit organization based in Los Angeles California. Its stated goal is "to improve the ethical quality of society by changing personal and organizational decision making and behavior" (Josephson Institute, 2006c). It is interesting to note that the emphasis on individual decision-making mentioned during the description of character education is a focal point in their mission statement.

In keeping with character education's focus on transforming the moral fabric of society *Character Counts!* is used as the youth branch of a wider program of ethical development. The Josephson Institute also offers programs in adult education and training in both the private and public sectors. *Character Counts!* itself was created as a result of the 1992 Aspen Declaration, made at a conference of the Josephson Institute (Josephson Institute, 1992). This declaration is the basis for the character education efforts of the institute and is thus worth quoting here in full.

1. The next generation will be the stewards of our communities, nation and planet in extraordinarily critical times.

2. In such times, the well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry with good moral character.

3. People do not automatically develop good moral character; therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help young people develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision-making and conduct.

4. Effective character education is based on core ethical values rooted in democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, justice and fairness, caring, and civic virtue and citizenship.

5. These core ethical values transcend cultural, religious and socioeconomic differences.

6. Character education is, first and foremost, an obligation of families and faith communities, but schools and youth service organizations also have a responsibility to help develop the character of young people.

> 7. These responsibilities are best achieved when these groups work in concert.
>
> 8. The character and conduct of our youth reflect the character and conduct of society; therefore, every adult has the responsibility to teach and model the core ethical values and every social institution has the responsibility to promote the development of good character.
>
> (Josephson Institute, 1992, para.2)

According to the list of signatories those attending included notable character education scholar Thomas Lickona, and representatives from organizations like the Girl and Boy Scouts of America, the Jefferson Center of Character Education, the Center for Ethics Studies at Marquette University, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers (Josephson Institute, 1992). *Character Counts!*, and the Josephson Institute, are funded by the members of their coalition through the sale of its materials and seminars as well as private donations (Josephson Institute, 2003). The group is both nonprofit, and tax exempt under American law (Josephson Institute, n.d.).

Character Counts! itself is a compilation of resources available for purchase from the Josephson Institute. It includes lesson plans, activity plans, promotional posters, stickers, character award certificates, interactive CDs, character bracelets and numerous other accessories. To start a character education program you are encouraged to buy a *Character Counts!* kit that includes the lesson plans, stickers, activity plans and various other classroom items. These kits range in price from 11.95 USD for an "incentive pack" to 899.95 USD for secondary level "value kits" (Josephson Institute, n.d.).

The lesson plans for *Character Counts!* are divided into age groups. These groups are ages four to six, six to nine, nine to eleven, eleven to thirteen, and teenagers. The lessons share similar formats and general structure, with each lesson including a list of 'DOs' and 'DON'Ts', an outline for a related class activity, and a discussion guide for the teacher (Josephson Institute, 1995a & 1995b). Handouts and worksheets are often also provided. Given that the lesson sets are labeled as for "teenagers (and other teachers)" these lessons must be intended to be used both by classroom teachers and older students in schools, but the notion of a student-teacher model is not fully developed in their sample lessons or supporting literature.

Each lesson focuses on a core value, like honesty, trustworthiness or respect, for instance. A typical lesson would begin with a discussion or focusing activity that would encourage the students to think about the topic for the day. They could, for instance, watch a skit put on by classmates that shows a situation in which a student is not being honest. The teacher would then debrief the students with a discussion of what was dishonest in the skit. As this is happening, and after the lesson has concluded, the teacher is instructed by the lesson plan to reinforce honest behavior with praise or rewards. The students then would often get a handout describing the value for that day, and what the 'DOs' and 'DON'Ts' are for that value. The students would then be called on, through an activity or discussion, to demonstrate that they have internalized the 'DOs' and

'DON'Ts" for that value. The emphasis is consistently placed on transmitting the core values taken to be universal. This formula fits very well with the emphasis character educators place on value transmission and behavior modification. As such, *Character Counts!* is specifically critiqued with many of the same points as those used against character education in general.

Criticisms of *Character Counts!*

The foci present in *Character Counts!* make it an excellent example of character education in practice. Thus, the general criticisms made of character education ring true for the specific practices of *Character Counts!*. It is useful, though, to take a moment and examine the criticism leveled directly at this program itself. A brief search of any major search engine or academic library catalogue is bound to result in a myriad of titles praising character education. This is due, in part, to the conflation of character education and moral education mentioned earlier in this chapter. Peggy Geren has, however, has authored a short but specific critique *Character Counts!*. To date this is the only critique which focuses expressely on this program. In providing an account of this critique I will describe Geren's commentary on the influence of *Character Counts!*, the rationale for the program, the view of children the program holds, and the connection this program has with conservative social movements.

Geren, a scholar at Augusta State University, wrote her brief critique of *Character Counts!* in 2001. Her analysis begins with a description of the power character education is beginning to wield in contemporary moral education. She notes, as an example of its influence, that the Josephson Institute was charged with writing a report on character education for George W. Bush during his first run for the presidency.

With respect to the rationale of the program, Geren notes the presence of the typical moral decay claims. The authors of *Character Counts!*, Geren argues, erroneously attribute virtually every social problem to the perceived decline of the traditional nuclear family (Geren, 2001). She makes the claim that the statistics used to support such claims of moral decay are poorly interpreted. She is skeptical, then, when the Josephson Institute argues that such issues are rectifiable through character education with programs like *Character Counts!*. While she does argue that these claims are based on poor reasoning and statistics, she does not go into depth on these critiques and, instead, focuses on the program itself.

Most importantly Geren concludes that the moral agency of young people is never seriously considered (Geren, 2001). Children are seen as moldable material that must be controlled and altered to foster morality. To accomplish this, she argues, *Character Counts!* is based heavily on "rules, sanctions, expectations, (and) the importance of adult modeling" (Geren, 2001, p.3). Beyond such methods, she argues, no comprehensive theory or philosophy is identified.

She also makes the claim that within the Josephson Institute's literature there is an "implicit political view which positions nontraditional families and the public school bureaucracy as adversaries" (Geren, 2001, p.4). This criticism, in particular, connects *Character Counts!* with the wider critiques of character education as a conservative reaction to contemporary social change. The notion that the Josephson Institute sees school administrators and nontraditional families as enemies indicates that there is aggressively conservative ideology underlying *Character Counts!*. Schools using this program are certain to have countless students that come from nontraditional families. What will these children be told about themselves? Will they be told that their families are not as moral as those of the other students? It would seem that the Josephson Institute sees those families as less moral, and threatening. As a result of such staunchly conservative views the authors of *Character Counts!* have established themselves as serving certain political interests.

In summary, Geren provides moral education with a very rare problematization of *Character Counts!*. This problematization begins with the claim that the Josephson Institute misconceives social ills. It goes on to outline a series of critiques that paint this program as a system of behavior modification that completely disregards student agency and learning needs. In short, Geren concludes that *Character Counts!* is an overly simple solution to an overly simplified list of social issues. This critique is not unique to *Character Counts!*. Indeed, very much the same is being said of character education as a movement. I will now move on to these more general criticisms that are directed against character education itself.

Criticisms of Character Education

While most of the features of character education are vehemently contested it is certainly fair to say that character education has become highly influential in many contemporary societies, especially the United States. With such attention and influence have come serious criticisms that accuse character educators of all manner of shortcomings from the philosophic to the sociological.

Broadly speaking, critiques of character education fit into three categories; educational critiques, critiques of underlying philosophy, and critiques of the reactionary worldview that is built into character education. This chapter will provide outlines and examples of the critiques common to these three categories.

Educational Critique

The educational critiques of character education focus on the way in which character educators emphasize traditional pedagogical methods. This explanation will account for these critiques by examining the key features of the traditional methods character educators refer to: an emphasis on behavior modification and a particular view of the role of the student. These two features will lead into an account of the reactions of numerous notable moral educators and social scholars.

Character education tends to be highly conservative in its treatment of pedagogical techniques. This conservatism often manifests itself as an argument for a return to teaching methods that date back over a century (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan, for example, hearken back to the perceived successes of the 1950s when they claim that, in that period, there was a commonly held conception that certain shared values existed (2001). Other character educators more directly claim that traditional teaching methods are proving effective once again (Wrynne, 1991, p.153). I will argue in my analysis that such traditional methods do not include developing independence, autonomous rationality, or social connections, and rather focus on behavior management. Indeed, Yu identifies behavior management as a key component of character education throughout its history (2004). This behavior management is often justified by character educators on the grounds that focusing on "process skills" may leave key ethical transmission in danger (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan, 2001, p.7).

There is, to start with, a great deal of doubt as to whether or not behavior management or modification has the ability to alter moral thought. Carr quite accurately points out that one can do what the teacher considers is right without knowing why one is doing it (2001). Wringe builds on this conception in explaining that a person who avoids negative behaviors may be better conditioned, rather than more morally developed (2006). In other words, one can behave like a good boy or girl simply to avoid punishment or negative attention. This does not mean that the child is more moral than before, it simply means the child is more obedient than before. A person raised to respect authority uncritically would be open to doing what others might consider immoral simply on the grounds of having been told to by a figure of perceived authority or power. Morality, in the eyes of these theorists, cannot be reduced to following directions. As Farrell warns, it is very difficult to have direct proof of moral development and we should be accordingly cautious of assuming it is taking place (2003).

This emphasis on changing behavior rather than thinking has earned character educators a great deal of criticism. Indeed, character educators are often perceived as viewing the student as a subject rather than an active participant in learning. Booi, writing about social studies teaching, notes that one can teach a student to be a citizen or a subject (2001). If you want critical thinkers that take an active part in the world around them you should educate citizens, if you desire docile compliance you should educate subjects. It would seem that character educators aim to create subjects, rather than citizens. Applying this dichotomy to Geren's (2001) analysis of *Character Counts!*, one sees that the student of the Josephson Institute is a subject rather than a citizen.

Such dogmatically traditional methods of teaching are regularly problematized from several scholarly camps. Noddings, for example, argues that there are much more effective alternatives (1994). She counters that mutual influence is more desirable because it fosters growth in a more natural way. If teachers grew with students into meaningfully cooperative relationships they would grow in morality as a community committed to each other's happiness. Others take a stance against character education on the basis of its being inherently undemocratic. Gutmann, for example, argues that democratic education must involve the skills required to share in governance, which is generally lacking in character education (1989). Bickmore also argues for more democratic teaching methods, noting that modern students require practice in democratic methods before they become adult citizens (2001). The emphasis on reinforcement and obedience present in character education is in direct opposition to democratic growth. In other words, traditional teaching focuses on authority, while democratic teaching focuses on independence (Bickmore, 2001). Traditional methods of teaching are becoming increasingly unpopular, with some scholars going so far as to label them a tyrannical form of education (Feinburg, 2003). In the end the discourses of moral education are highly critical of approaches that emphasize control over autonomy, and character education certainly fits that description. This concern, however, has not been the most damaging.

Perhaps the most damage to the cause of character education has been inflicted by the empirical studies that, every few decades, seem to demonstrate the lack of efficacy of the traditional character education teaching methods. As was identified earlier in this chapter the most serious of these was the Hartshorne-May study in the late 1920s that found character education had no significant effect on student conduct (1928-1930). More recent studies have corroborated the notion that behavior change as a result of character education is limited, if present at all (Leming, 1993). As I will demonstrate in my analysis of the survey techniques of the Josephson Institute, this critique is taken very seriously by character educators and numerous actions are being taken to demonstrate the efficacy of character education programs through empirical research.

Philosophic Critique

The ethical philosophy behind character education is simple. The basic precept is that morality is defined by a set of virtues, often referred to in character education literature as "core values". This position garners some of the harshest and most direct criticism that one finds with respect to character education. My account of the philosophic criticisms made of character education will be built around three broad themes: the roots of character education in Aristotelian philosophy, the vagueness with which character educators describe their core values, and the absence of reasoning skills in character education's approach.

First and foremost character education is correctly identified by critics as based on Aristotelian ethics. Lickona, for example, draws on Aristotle's notion of right conduct in his writing (2004). Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan use Aristotle's virtue scale in constructing their arguement (2001). Critics generally point out that these character educators read Aristotle inappropriately, largely missing the nuance of his position. Nucci, for instance, identifies this problem and concludes character educators depend on this very narrow reading of Aristotelian thought. Yu makes a similar point in his work, which compares character education to Chinese patriotic education (2004). But what exactly is wrong with this supposedly narrow reading?

Yu identifies that Aristotle recognized the contextual nature of virtues, in other words that something like honesty could look different in different situations (2004). The emphasis character educators place on the universality of virtues generally ignores this contextual element. Carr succinctly explains this in saying that the issue is not whether or not any virtue is a good one, that anyone would agree that abstract ideas like honesty are generally good (1991). The problem tends to be, from Carr's perspective, what you do about those virtues in specific situations. According to Carr, the question is what lies in the gap between the abstract virtues and the specific situations. This gap is generally argued to be filled with moral reasoning. Such reasoning is generally absent from character education literature and programs. Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan identify that their character development process requires reflection, understanding and action (2001). It is notable that neither reflection, nor understanding, nor action requires the student to come to any position or define any idea for themselves. The students is merely doing what they are instructed to do and reflecting on how well they did what they were told. Given that character educators tend to ignore reasoning, their virtues may become difficult for students to apply in novel contexts.

This "narrow" reading of Aristotle is also criticized on the grounds that character education's virtues are so vague they have little practical meaning (Geren, 2001). For example, if one were to ask if honesty were a universal value it would not be difficult to obtain a vast majority who would agree. If one were to say that honesty meant doing a certain thing in a contentious situation the responses may very well be different. For example, if one were to ask if police investigators should be permitted to lie during interrogations one would likely find different answers than if one were to ask if honesty itself is important. In this way character educators seem to have obtained agreement over a "set of abstractions" that have little practical use (Geren, 2001, p.6).

The reason that these virtues are seen as having little use is the vague way they are defined. Lukes points out that if you define values so vaguely you are likely to find yourself in a moral dilemma in which two notions conflict (1989). This is because these universal values have, as Eamonn Callan might say, only thin commonalities rather than deep universal consistency (1995). Honesty sometimes conflicts with respect, for example. One could tell the truth and say that a teacher isn't very well informed about something, and show a great deal of disrespect. The only way to avoid such issues is to clearly define values, and/or to teach the reasoning required to reconcile them in unclear situations. McLaughlin and Halstead summarize this critique best when they say that virtues are properly understood as "composite", that is to say they are composed of social and cognitive variables that are not universal (1999, p.134). In contrast to such a position Thomas Lickona argues:

> Virtues–such as honesty, justice courage, and compassion–are dispositions to behave in a morally good way. They are objectively good human qualities, good for use whether we know it or not. They are affirmed by societies and religions around the world. Because they are intrinsically good, they have a claim on our conscience. Virtues transcend time and culture (although their cultural expression may vary); justice and kindness, for example, will always and everywhere be virtues, regardless of how many people exhibit them. (Lickona, 2004, p.7)

Lickona's position is such that students would require very little skill in reasoning. If virtues are as clear and permanent as he claims they are, one need only learn what has been discovered about them. If one assumes that moral behavior can be fostered through the teaching of virtues without reasoning, as is the case in character education, it follows that reasoning must not be a key part of moral life. According to character educators one must simply follow the moral code they are given. This position, often associated with Lickona, is vehemently assaulted within moral education for ignoring what many believe to be a key component of moral life, critical thought.

As Carr points out, one cannot view following directions as constituting moral behavior (1991). He argues that without reasoning virtues carry little meaning, and that they require work to apply. Indeed, Nucci identifies this reliance on general traits as the key mistake of character education throughout its history (2001). The argument is also made that one cannot reasonably expect someone to accept these virtues anyway, because they are externally supplied and not personally arrived at (Gutmann, 1989).

As a result of criticisms like these character education is regularly problematized within academia as being based on vague virtues that grow out of poor readings of Greek philosophy. It is criticized for downplaying reasoning and for failing to rigorously investigate its philosophic claims. If one were to accept these criticisms to be true, where do these educational and philosophic weaknesses come from? In short, many of these issues come from the political baggage that character education carries.

Worldview Critique

The relationship between character education and reactionary politics is an important point to develop before I move on to a survey of the alternatives offered to character education. This discussion will focus on three interrelated themes within this worldview: the perception of a worsening moral crisis, the perception that this crisis is related to the supposedly destructive force of moral relativism, and the connection between character education and the legitimating of social obedience. I will begin with a discussion of the claim of moral crisis.

Gutmann claims that any position on education is necessarily linked with a corresponding position on how society ought to be (1989). Within the context of character education this view of society tends to emphasize an increasingly dangerous tide of youth immorality that is pushing a given nation into moral decay. Bohlin, Farmer and Ryan provide an excellent example of this kind of thinking:

> Growing rates of violence, victimization, and discontent in schools have driven some to give up hope of educating for character in schools today. A recent Josephson Institute of Ethics study found that one out of five high school boys carried a weapon to school. Seventy-five percent of boys and 60 percent of girls surveyed reported that in the past year they had hit someone out of anger. (Bohlin, Farmer, & Ryan, 2001, p.xi)

This type argument is most common in Britain and the United States (Arthur, 2003), with Britain's variant taking a more civic democratic form (Gatherer, 2004). Along with a list of fairly commonly perceived social problems (drug abuse, violence, etc.) character educators add several more contentious issues like sexual immorality, an argument which seems to draw heavily on

Christian notions of sexual abstinence. As Geren points out, virtually all social issues are tied back to the supposed decay of the traditional nuclear family (2001).

Packaged with this perspective, commonly identified as right-wing (Yu, 2004), we also see warnings against the acceptance of moral relativism (Arthur, 2003). William Bennett, American politician and character education advocate, discusses this issue at great length in his book *The De-Valuing of America* (1992). He argues that American society is locked in a struggle between liberal elites who favour a pluralist, relativistic stance, and those who argue for the teaching of American values. One of the key problems, from this perspective, is that blind dedication to pluralism erodes fundamental values that serve as adhesive social forces. In the American context this argument is quite prominent. Indeed, the literature produced by the Josephson Institute is replete with traditional American images. Most notably their promotional materials make extensive use of the iconic pillars used in American government buildings as they attempt to draw a metaphor about the fundamental nature of American values.

Perhaps the best critique of this approach is found in Tianlong Yu's *Character Education and Political Control*, which sees the roots of such reactionary morality as extending far into the past (2004). Yu sees character education as being a fairly direct product of fluctuations in American dominance abroad. In instances where that dominance is questioned, and signs of difficulty appear at home, conservative movements gain momentum as they argue for a return to the virtues that "built" America. Once such example is the 1980s, as American dominance was challenged on several levels (Yu identifies economic, military and political difficulties). Post 9-11 one can certainly see how fear and uncertainty can cause people to look to clear answers and familiar remedies.

The problem with this approach is that it is most acceptable to those in positions of dominance (Callan, 1997). Surely a Native American or Aboriginal Canadian would have difficulty feeling comforted by the frontier virtues of the European settler. Similarly, a homeless resident of Los Angeles would likely take issue with the rugged individualism espoused by traditionalists. Yet those in power seem utterly convinced that these traditional values apply to all. Both recent American presidents (G.W. Bush and Clinton) clearly supported character education, with the Republicans doing so more emphatically (Yu, 2004).

As was previously illustrated character education teaches moral obedience over autonomous thought. To legitimate this teaching of obedience character educators make sweeping claims of a "crisis of youth" that threatens the moral fiber of society (Smetana, 2005). From rising crime rates, to decreasing test scores, to the tide of youth immorality, character educators give the dominant class a great deal to worry about.

Critics of character education counter by saying this is a reactionary response to normal social realities, that it merely functions to legitimate control (Yu, 2004). In this context "legitimating" deals with the defending of certain power structures (Benhabib, 1989). The claims of slumping work ethic among students are argued to be more a reflection of the fears of employers than a legitimate educational crisis (Arthur, 2003). The statistics indicating widespread social decay are labeled as having been arrived at through poor reasoning and ineffective research (Geren, 2001). Yu argues, for example, that the slumping S.A.T. scores so often mentioned in the United States are more likely a result of more people being able to write them rather than decreasing quality in the education system (Yu, 2004). In general this broad social crisis is branded as exaggerated, if not completely fabricated (Smetana, 2005).

Character education takes a clear and definitive stand in many ways. Its proponents identify a list of social issues, and tie them directly to a lack of moral teaching and decay in traditional social structures. Critics respond by pointing out that the philosophy behind these stances is vague and incomplete. They counter the claims of social crisis by outlining faulty reasoning and narrow research methods used by character education organizations. They argue that character education simply serves the dominant groups by fostering obedience and control in the image of those groups.

Survey of Alternatives

Such ardent critiques beg the question of what one may do in place of character education. To answer this question I will now move to a survey of the alternatives to character education. This examination will not only illuminate some of the competing perspectives but also set the stage for the construction of the critical framework which I will use to examine *Character Counts!*.

Speaking in the broadest of terms we should not see character education as a direct category of education as science or math education would be. Rather, it is a form of moral education, which is itself a category of education. This distinction may seem minor, but it is a critical one to establish as early as is possible. If one sees character education to be a category of education one could reasonably conclude that character education is the only form of education that deals with matters of character. This might seem like a fairly intuitive observation, but it is nevertheless a false one. Character education, as I will demonstrate, is but one answer to the question of what morals or morality ought to be taught in formal schooling. There are many forms of moral education of which character education is but one. Many of these forms deal with questions of character as part of their approach.

As I examine the various categories of moral education programs it is important to remember that these categories do not have sharply defined boundaries. Some specific approaches may sit on the border between two or more categories. It is, however, highly valuable to conduct an examination of the general landscape of a discourse to create a picture with which one may interpret various issues.

This examination will involve a discussion of five alternatives to character education: the Kohlbergian justice reasoning approach, the values clarification approach, the caring approach, the citizenship approach, and the spiritual-religious approach. In addition to these alternatives I will also discuss the notion that explicit moral instruction should be left out of schools. The six topics, the five approaches and the 'no morality' approach, will be examined to identify their sources, how they are rationally supported, and what they propose for education.

No Morality In Schools

I begin my discussion of the alternatives to character education with a discussion of those who think morality ought to be left out of formal schooling entirely. This stand against moral education is rebutted from many scholarly camps and these rebuttals will be presented next.

I will start with the examination provided by Chazan (1985). He identifies five major claims within the 'no morality in schools' camp. First, it is argued that schools should not be teaching moral lessons that are contentious. If a school is teaching something that is not fully objective, it should cease to do so. Second, those who oppose school sanctioned moral education often do so for reasons of individual liberty, arguing against a state authored moral code being taught in schools. Third, some posit that moral education may legitimate power structures that oppress lower classes. For example, capitalists may build capitalist values into moral education and thereby contribute to economic oppression through school-based socialization. Fourth it is argued that moral education may not be effective in enacting moral change, even if it is needed. Fifth, and finally, opponents of moral education posit that schools encourage a dependent relationship between school and student and therefore cannot teach morality. The point here is that teachers and administrators tend to emphasize approaches that treat the student as a *tabula rasa* and not an active participant. Within such an approach students are taught they need something that schools have, not that they ought to be active participants in the co-creation of knowledge. This process creates a dominant-dependant relationship between teachers and students that is claimed to act contrary to the needs of liberal autonomy.

These arguments to stop moral education arose out of the paradigm shifting era of the 1960s (Chazan, 1985). As a result they grew up alongside many other radical perspectives in the rapidly changing social sciences. While the 'no morality' approach points to the shortcomings of moral education, it has largely fallen from favour as further shifts in thinking have convinced scholars that moral education is unavoidable.

Carr, for example, argues that no matter how hard we try we cannot separate moral education from education (1991). Even if a teacher wanted to avoid morality that teacher would impart certain moral lessons inadvertently. Imagine teachers A and B, both of whom are teachers of high school social studies. Teacher A is opposed to moral education being included in formal schooling and thus seeks to avoid it. Teacher B supports moral education and overtly discusses morality when such issues arise in class. Carr would argue that both teachers are teaching moral lessons and that they differ only insofar as they are being open about, and cognizant of, that teaching. Teacher A avoids open moral lessons but none-the-less makes moral decisions that students are likely to emulate. Teacher A is also likely to punish and reward based on his or her own moral system and thus will be teaching those moral systems through classroom management.

To take the argument a step further, Mary Warnock argues this inescapable nature of moral education means that teachers are obliged to take moral stances (1975). Since educators teach morals anyway they ought to be open about modeling moral behavior. Educators must also take such stances because students need to see that taking a stand is important (Warnock, 1975). If a teacher always approaches political or moral issues with an attitude of apparent indifference that teacher will model indifference with respect to important issues. If a teacher acts as if such issues matter, and takes stances that allow or encourage students to disagree, those students will learn that moral stances matter.

As a result of such arguments those supporting an avoidance of morality in schools are left in a precarious position. If they hold that morality should not be taught in schools they are refuted by the vast body of literature indicating that morality is taught no matter what we do. If they hold that morality is not imparted through schools they are left on the outside of popular discourses and are saddled with the difficult task of proving that children are morally unaffected by their schooling. With the current trends toward examination of marginalizing school practices, the hidden curriculum, and hidden power structures, it is becoming increasingly difficult to argue that morality can be divorced from schooling. Thus the question tends to be what form moral education should take. One of the classic responses to this question is that moral education ought to focus on the development of a certain kind of moral reasoning that fosters justice.

Kohlbergian Justice Reasoning

This focus on moral reasoning is generally associated with Lawrence Kohlberg and is thus labeled 'Kohlbergian justice reasoning', and alternatively the cognitive-developmental approach (Yu, 2004). The Kohlbergian justice approach grew in opposition to some of the uncertainties that spawned the anti-moral education theorists of the mid to late 20th century. More specifically, some claim that Kohlberg is part of a counter-relativist movement of the late 20th century (Chazan, 1985). The core of his theory is that justice is the core of morality (1984). He viewed justice as "the distribution of rights and duties regulated by concepts of equality and reciprocity' (1984, p.184). In other words, morality is defined by justice, which is defined by a system of moral concepts. Unlike other forms of moral education, which will be identified later, the Kohlbergian approach does not focus on defining the nature of those concepts. Rather, Kohlberg's approach was centered on the nature of the reasoning that one uses to identify what best satisfies the various requirements of justice.

Kohlberg's work is characterized by taking an empirical perspective on moral education. He identified a series of six stages that represented the progress each person goes through on their way to becoming the most morally capable person possible. He is careful to note, in doing so, that not all people reach the highest stage (Kohlberg, 1984). His stages depend on cognitive or logical capacity. As ability to reason develops there is a corresponding development in the justice or moral reasoning stage reached (Kohlberg, 1984). At each stage the reasons a person uses for doing what is right changes. The following excerpts show the reasons for right behavior evident at each stage:

1. *Heteronymous Morality:* [What is right is defined by an] avoidance of punishment, and the power of authorities.

2. *Instrumental Purpose and Exchange:* [What is right is defined by the desire] to serve one's own needs or interests and through acknowledging that others are doing the same thing. The notion of a fair exchange is present in this stage.

3. *Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity:* [What is right is defined by] the need to be a good person in your own eyes and those of others. Your caring for others. Belief in the Golden Rule. Desire to maintain rules and authority which support stereotypical good behavior.

4. *Social System and Conscience:* [What is right is defined by the desire] to keep the institution going as a whole, avoiding a breakdown in the system, "if everyone did it", or the imperative of conscience to meet one's defined obligations

5. *Social Contract or Utility and Individual Rights:* [What is right is defined by] a sense of obligation to law because of one's social contract to make and abide by laws for the welfare of all and for the protection of all people's rights. A feeling of contractual commitment, freely entered

> upon, to family, friendship, trust, and work obligations. Concern that laws and duties be based on rational calculation of overall utility, "the greatest good for the greatest number."
>
> 6. *Universal Ethic:* [What is right is defined by] the belief as a rational person in the validity of universal moral principles, and a sense of personal commitment to them.
>
> (Kohlberg, 1984, p.175)

In order to place someone in one of these stages Kohlberg devised a series of moral problems and interviewed subjects to determine how they decided what was right in certain situations (Kohlberg, 1984). He then scored the responses and ranked the subjects according to stage.

In an attempt to verify this empirical approach Kohlbergian scholars have led empirical studies to determine whether people actually followed the progression he outlined. It was found through longitudinal and cross-sectional studies that his sequential moral progression held true in both rural and urban settings, and across the United States, Israel and Turkey (Kohlberg, Snarey & Reimer, 1984; Kohlberg & Nisan, 1984). Within his analysis Kohlberg did note that some life events can cause a regression in your justice stage (Kohlberg, 1984). In a rather humorous point he noted that college, for example, caused a temporary lapse into hedonism (1984).

Kohlberg argued that since morality requires reasoning, one needs increasingly high levels of reasoning to become more moral. If your growth in reasoning slows or stalls, so to would your growth in morality. If one is to accept Kohlberg's view of morality as being constituted by justice reasoning along a sequential progression, schools must, therefore, provide training in critical reasoning as a prerequisite to the development of morality. Therefore a Kohlbergian moral education would include extensive training in logic and reasoning, likely relying heavily on dialogue and rational deliberation. Furthermore, Kohlberg's work has grave implications for the practice of education in general. If one were to assume that all moral development aimed at the attaining of the same cognitive process, one would likely see this process used as justification for limitations on legitimate moral plurality. For example, if a student were to write an assignment that took a stance in disagreement with the teacher, the teacher could, using Kohlberg's reasoning stages as justification, label that thinking as rudimentary or as lacking advanced thinking. While many students will undoubtedly use poor reasoning that needs to be corrected, it is also possible that a teacher could misdiagnose such problems.

Kohlberg has been criticized by countless theorists, most notably feminist moral educators like Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan. The notion that morality is reducible to universal systems of reasoning sets Kohlberg apart from many of the other approaches that will be discussed in this chapter. Most notably he is distanced from the more post-modern perspectives evident in values clarification programs.

Values Clarification

Values clarification, like the anti-moral education movement, came into being in the 1960s (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). This decade saw a movement toward cultural relativism that worked its way into education (Yu, 2004). As part of this trend values clarification emerged as a way of providing moral education without being overly prescriptive. At its most basic level, values clarification held that morality is not defined by adherence to external systems of rules or beliefs (Chazan, 1985). As a result, one could fairly view this approach as a compromise between the avoidance of moral education and outright moral transmission as occurs in character education.

Values clarification it is not a coherent system, authored by a single theorist or group (Chazan, 1985). Those who work with values clarification do, however, seem to hold certain beliefs that revolve around the notion of autonomy within moral development. These beliefs are labeled, by Chazan, as consistent with the emergence of socially acceptable pluralism in the moral sphere (1985).

In values clarification ones sees a great emphasis on dialogue and discussion (Yu, 2004). This is not to be confused, though, with the type of rational confrontation that is often found in schools. The point of a discussion in a values clarification program is not to defeat the other person's beliefs through rhetorical strength, but rather to determine what one thinks for oneself through the sharing of ideas. Rational confrontation tends to assume that *an* answer will be found while values clarification claims that moral thinking is contextual, and cannot be universalized as Kohlberg advocated (Yu, 2004).

Values clarification, as a general framework, is highly useful. It points out some of the dangers of prescriptive moral education and articulates arguments for the autonomy of students. It does, however, fall prey to the same philosophic weaknesses that general moral relativism does. Most notably one could note that liberal democracy cannot abide by all beliefs. Some moral stances must be confronted and perhaps even suppressed in the interest of ensuring the continuity of the liberal state. For example, if a student determined that his or her position valued racial purity and began harassing other students the school has an obligation to intervene. Within liberal states the right to free speech is obviously restricted by the need for tolerance. Values clarification struggles with such limitations.

Kirshenbaum, a values clarification supporter, argues that the goal of values clarification is to have student form values that are both "personally satisfying" and "socially constructive" (1978, p.16). This two-part requirement is an effort at silencing the relativistic criticism. Indeed, Kirschenbaum directly addresses this contention and asserts that values clarification is not relativistic and in fact seeks to promote autonomy and justice (1978). The fact, however, remains that values clarification puts itself in a very difficult position. If one is to hold the students as the final arbiters of their own values, what can one say when they arrive at values that they feel are socially constructive but that the teacher feels are not? The absence of external verification that underpins values clarification puts this approach at the opposite end of the spectrum from character education. Character educators depend so much on external authority that students are often not a part of the authoring of their own value system. Values clarification leaves students to arrive at positions that may not be constructive in the eyes of others. Should a teacher using values clarification begin to more closely instruct students in what positions are "socially constructive" that teacher would be moving their practice away from values clarification and towards character education.

This delicate balance between control and autonomy is characterized by the values clarification-character education dichotomy. As a departure from this dichotomy I will now move to a theorist who attempts to leave this issue in favour of a completely different paradigm.

The Caring Approach

The caring approach is generally associated with Nel Noddings (Callan, 1995). While there are many different ways one may express caring and integrate it into educational theory, I shall focus here on the conceptualization authored by this scholar specifically.

Noddings grounds her work by placing it as a critique against the more conventional forms of moral education, most notably the Kohlbergian justice approach (1994). She makes the observation that such conventional methods are centered on argument as the vehicle for the determination of truth (Noddings, 1994). Such methods, according to Noddings, are fundamentally masculine and neglect feminine moral conceptions (1994). Her alternative rejects this emphasis on rational argumentation and supplants a relational form of thinking. She argues that instead of jumping directly to confrontational reasoning, you should first examine the relationship between the people involved (Noddings, 1988). This is where the approach gets its name. Noddings argues that instead of reasoning, or some sort of process skill, moral education should be based on the fostering of caring relationships (1988).

Noddings notes that if you truly believe that something your student has done or said is wrong it is not possible for you to have a true dialogue (1988). You should, rather, attempt to create a caring relationship with that student first (Noddings, 1994). Only after this relationship is established can you actually deal with the issue that divided you in the first place (Noddings, 1994). Noddings seems to view caring as the primary occupation of a teacher, and thus a prerequisite for good teaching. That which is moral, then, is defined within this perspective as a function of your embodiment of loving action. Noddings contends that this type of loving relationship brings down the walls between people that prevent them from seeing the other's points of view, and they become more intellectually vulnerable (Noddings, 1994).

But what is to be done with an issue if you still disagree after becoming closely bound emotionally? Within this approach one then engages in what Noddings calls "ordinary conversation" (Noddings, 1994). Ordinary conversation is an open and honest dialogue between student and teacher that holds that the partners of the conversation are paramount, even above the subject of the discussion itself (Noddings, 1994). For example, a teacher using ordinary conversation would likely not use an argument that would dismiss the students ideas, knowing that this would win the argument but sour the relationship. This approach, Noddings notes, is often viewed as feminine (1988). As a result it is often seen as a feminine counter practice to what is viewed as a cold, rational, masculine, Kohlbergian approach (Yu, 2004).

This perspective, like any other, has its detractors. Callan makes what is perhaps the most penetrating rebuttal of the caring perspective when he posits that one cannot develop a truly caring relationship with someone with a radically differing view (1995). One may not, for example, develop a long-term caring relationship with a committed racist. Thus, while the caring perspective has many useful points to make, it fails much as the other approaches do in delivering a complete set of answers to the most pressing problems. Namely, it does not answer the question of what to do with those with anti-liberal views.

Thus, because it is enormously difficult to create a moral education that includes all members of society, we ought to answer this question of what to do about such illiberal views. Some theorists, however, do not argue that a certain form of moral education needs to be appropriate for all citizens. Those theorists often belong to the most aged form of moral education, the religious-spiritual approach.

The Religious-Spiritual Approach

Religion, in this sense, refers to organized faith. Spirituality implies a more informal, or less collectively organized form of faith. Both, however, are bound by their mutual emphasis on highly metaphysical claims. While there are obviously complex differences between the two, within moral education they occupy similar space and will therefore be dealt with jointly. For the sake of expedience I will refer to them as the spiritual approach.

From this point of view it becomes important to raise children within a spiritually encouraging environment. This is the driving motive behind the many forms of sectarian schooling found across North America and the world. It is argued, by theorists like Svi Shapiro, that one needs this kind of religiously and culturally grounded experience before taking part in the greater liberal society (1998). This communitarian argument is a key link between spiritual education and character education. They both make the point that people ought to be bound together by uniform moral codes.

Communitarians themselves argue that moral learning is intimately linked with the morals and norms of specific groups and that, therefore, community cannot be ignored in moral education (Strike, 2000). This point brings up an important distinction within spiritual education. The kind of communal moral education discussed by theorists like Strike has been labeled as religious-spiritual education from the inside as opposed to from the outside (Alexander & McLaughlin, 2003). This kind of moral education sees students actively taking part in a spiritual tradition. These spiritual traditions can provide mutual support and cohesive communities for students to grow in. In this way such education may fit rather well with Noddings' conception of caring schools. In this case, that which is moral is defined by the tradition. Within a Christian school, for example, the Word of God may be considered the path to a moral life. The key point of contention in that context is that a serious ethical argument could possibly lead to an interpretive or hermeneutic conflict at the expense of rational forms of deliberation. For example, a student may allow key moral issues to be answered by a religious text as opposed to employing reasoning to understand the issue. While it is a person's right to answer moral questions with religious revelation it is dangerous to rely completely on externally supplied answers. Since dilemmas are bound to arise one will always require skill in rational analysis.

This concern is one of the most serious criticisms that can be leveled against spiritual moral education. Speaking anecdotally, the stereotype that faith may take precedence over rationality or that revelation may take precedence over science is a pervasive one. Supporters of spiritual moral education, however, respond by pointing out that secular deliberation is not the only acceptable vehicle for moral dialogue (Burtt, 1994; Alexander & McLaughlin, 2003). It is also argued that if you were to force secular moral education on students you may very well prevent their growth within their spiritual tradition (Burtt, 1994).

Despite such claims the argument is still often made that all students require certain common moral lessons. That is, no matter where someone goes to school they need certain knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Liberal democracy itself is argued to require the teaching of certain liberal values in schools (Gutmann, 1989; Galston, 1991; Alexander & McLaughlin, 2003; Feinberg, 2003). This notion that a liberal society depends on liberal moral education is most clearly dealt with in citizenship education.

The Citizenship Approach

Returning to the dichotomy between control and autonomy in moral education citizenship fits somewhere between the two extremes. It allows a certain amount of autonomous morality as values clarification would. It emphasizes rational thinking as Kohlberg would, but is also endorses certain values as core to the greater community, much as character education would. This balance is characterized by the notion of the 'citizen' as both an individual and as a part of the greater polity.

Gutmann explains that this polity is premised on a certain kind of neutrality with respect to moral questions (1989). She adds that a properly conceived democratic citizen is both ruled by, and shares in the ruling of, that polity (1989). This relationship, that of the rulers and the ruled, is essentially moral (Wringe, 2006). A citizenship educator prepares students for this sharing of power and the moral implications that come with that balance. As a result a citizenship educator may very well draw on notions from values clarification, character education, Kohlbergian justice reasoning, the caring approach, or all of these approaches.

Despite seeming to draw on these other approaches citizenship education does take issue with some of their positions. For example, those advocating civic forms of moral education argue that a child should be taught (on a mandatory basis) the skills that would allow them to diverge from the belief systems of their parents (Feinberg, 2003). Such teaching could likely offend those with deep commitment to their spiritual perspective. If a parent believed that spiritual salvation depended on complete faith, the teaching of liberal notions could jeopardize that child's spiritual future. Citizenship educators would be quick to point out that breaking with one's parents' spirituality is a legitimate expectation for the young and a necessary right for democratic citizens. Thus a citizenship educator, in the interest of protecting the notion of the democratic citizen, would equip students with knowledge and skills that may very well lead them away from certain religious positions.

This statement begs the question of what exactly is meant when a citizenship educator refers to a democratic citizen? Citizenship educators are quick to point out that a democratic citizen is much more than a mere voter (Booi, 2001). True democratic moral education involves meaningful sharing of power, and critical rationality (Bickmore, 2001). From this perspective one must ensure that students have adequate opportunities to exercise this kind of democratic participation in democratic bodies within their schools (Farrell, 2001).

Meaningful democratic participation presupposes a certain amount of philosophic and rational capability in all people, regardless of their educational background. Sprod, for example, argues that all people have their own form of thinking that is like an "ordinary" form of philosophy (2001). This faith in the rational abilities of all people is a key feature of citizenship education. All students can take a meaningful role in the polity, and schools must facilitate their growth towards that role.

This view, that citizenship education can act as a common denominator for all citizens, is not without its critics. Osbourne, for example, contends that the concept of ‘citizenship’ can hide the self-serving actions of the elite beneath a veneer of collective welfare and plural democracy (1997). While one can certainly see how some conceptions of citizenship emphasize passivity, or highly hegemonic practices, it is also true that a well-conceived notion of citizenship can act as a tool of emancipation. Citizenship educators Reeher and Cammarano, perhaps, summarize citizenship education best when they say that one cannot separate education and citizenship, or education and the world around it (1997, p.15). Thus we must create forms of education that recognize that education is essentially about citizenship and the world outside of schools.

Concluding Remarks on the Alternatives to Character Education

The notion that citizenship can act as unifying idea within moral education is certainly a valuable one. Indeed, all of the approaches discussed in this survey have contributed useful ideas about how schools ought to foster morality. They all hold unique perspectives on society, the role of education in fostering morality, and the shape that education ought to take. Before moving on to next portion of the chapter, I point to a summarization of the approaches found in figure 1. The figure categorizes the position of each approach along three dimensions: view of society, view of education, and implied pedagogy. I caution that the characterizations in the figure are abbreviated, and fuller explanations are found in the discussion of the approaches found earlier in this section.

Figure 1

The Alternatives To Character Education

Name of Approach	View of Society	View of Education	Implied Pedagogy
Kohlbergian Justice Reasoning	Composed of people at differing stages of ethical development.	Education must foster growth in justice reasoning.	Dialogic, heavy emphasis on rational deliberation and reasoning.
Values Clarification	Highly plural. Infinite moral diversity is legitimate.	Give students the tools to reason their own stances. Emphasis is not on confronting the view of others.	Emphasis on non-confrontational reasoning.
Caring	Often highly male, coldly rational. Low emphasis on relational thinking.	Foster long-term growth and strong, caring relationships between all members of school community.	Teacher should work with students over the long term to foster close bonds. Less emphasis on reasoning.
Citizenship	Plural, liberal democratic. Society is a state of individuals.	Should provide students with the tools to participate in democracy.	Give students opportunities for reasoning and democratic engagement.
Spiritual/Religious	Society benefits from the presence of citizens motivated by faith.	Education should provide experience within a tradition, rooted in shared beliefs.	No pedagogy is clearly common between various traditions.

Framework for Critique

Having examined the general nature of character education and the alternatives to it I will now move into what my work will contribute to discourses of moral education. As was previously mentioned this study examined *Character Counts!* as a specific program of character education. To drive this examination I will compile a list of eight positive characteristics that will serve as the basis for my critique of *Character Counts!*. These characteristics will be drawn from the writing of an interdisciplinary group of scholars and will be referred to as my 'critical framework'. While this list is certainly not an exhaustive one, it does represent key themes and headings that are of great use.

This section of the chapter will discuss the nature of each of the points in the framework and will explain the rationale for their selection. It will proceed systematically, discussing each individually, and will culminate in a succinct presentation of all eight points.

1. Reasoning

Any comprehensive program of moral education needs to deal with reasoning on some level. While some approaches may de-emphasize reasoning in the classical Western sense, like the caring approach, no approach to moral education is complete without addressing the role and form of reasoning in moral life.

Reason can be simply defined as the process of "critical thought and choice" (Peters, 1981, p.45). In much of the classic literature on moral education reasoning is viewed as paramount. As Scriven argues, "it's essential to democracy that its citizens be both independently capable of reasoning about the issues that confront it *and* be able to use the social force of reason to persuade one another." (Scriven, 1976, p.3). In this way reasoning is seen as a critical quality that needs to be present in order to have healthy, functional democracy.

Reasoning is also a key component of moral education. Robert Ennis, author of *Critical Thinking*, identifies six key components of critical thinking; focus, reasons, inference, situation, clarity, and overview (1996, p.4). Taking the first three points as an example it becomes readily apparent how reasoning forms a key part of moral education. Ennis identifies focus as the act of "figure[ing] out the main point, issue, question, or problem" (1996, p.4). "Reasons" involves the ability to "judge the acceptability" of your reasons and those of other people (p.5). Inference involves judging if you have reasonable grounds to make a certain conclusion (p.6).

Let us say that teacher A encountered a situation whereby a student refuses to sit near another student because that student is unpopular. A person motivated by a desire to make the best moral choice would follow a process similar to the one Ennis proposes. It would seem natural for that teacher to identify what the issue was, in this case prejudice versus the right of that student to sit where they want to. The teacher would then make a conclusion about what to do, and in doing so evaluate the reasons for taking a certain action and the judgment they had made from those reasons. While the reasoning at each stage may be different from person to person, this basic level of awareness and engagement is a necessary part of moral decision-making. Let us now examine the reverse. Should teacher A ignore the underlying issue, his or her reasons for reacting, and the appropriateness of that decision, that teacher would be failing to understand the moral implications of the situation because they were avoiding an analysis of it. The same is true for students. If a student is faced with a moral dilemma it stands to reason that they would need to understand the issue and their various reasons for acting. Students then, must be given opportunities to develop the qualities that would allow for such reflection. This imperative will be the first point on my critical framework.

1. Moral reasoning should be fostered as a part of moral life.

2. *What To Do With Reasoning*

Larry Booi, former President of the Alberta Teachers Association, brings up an excellent point when asks what kind of student we wish to educate and for what kind of society (Booi, 2001)? He notes that educators can educate two types of students: those who become citizens equipped with efficacy and agency, and those who simply obey laws and engage in the somewhat meaningless practice of voting (Booi, 2001). In other words he sees two possible citizens; the actively and the passively involved. This question, of the difference between the independent thinker and the uncritical follower, is a key one in moral education.

Booi uses different words but he is essentially speaking about the desirability of autonomy. An autonomous person is one who is able to "apply rules intelligently in the light of relevant differences and circumstances and to revise rules from time to time in light of changes in circumstances and in empirical knowledge about the consequences of their application." (Peters, 1981, p.33). Autonomy is a key part of moral life because it is the vehicle through which a person authors his or her own code of conduct (Peters, 1981). Reasoning itself, in comparison, is merely a basis. The way in which we use that reasoning is a separate question that is often ignored (Siegel, 1988). Thus, as I argue for the presence of reasoning in moral education, I also posit that such reasoning must be employed in the enterprise of fostering critical independence and self-authorship of codes of conduct. In other words reasoning ought to be used, among other things, to promote autonomy. As Booi often notes, students need to take positions and make decisions for themselves (Personal Communication, 2005).

2. A good moral education program ought to foster autonomy through the employment of critical reasoning.

3. Reigning In Reasoning

As this discussion touts the merit of education in reasoning it is important to conceptualize the limits of this reasoning. Galston makes this point when she argues that society cannot rely exclusively on any form of critical reasoning (1991). Highly philosophic reasoning often encourages a great amount of skepticism. This skepticism can be highly detrimental to societies. While critical reasoning is highly useful, a certain fundamental basis is required. If all citizens were to spend their time critiquing each policy or program for themselves there would be little in the way of social cohesion or practical efficiency. Some imperatives need to stand regardless of individual perceptions of them simply because they are too important to have regularly assaulted. A society requires a base of values that make pluralism possible. This basis is often described in character education literature as coming from core values. So, in search of a third positive characteristic, I will discuss some of the limits proposed by moral educators.

Gutmann identifies toleration and mutual respect as the minimal basis for democratic societies (1989). We need to be safe, accepted and respected as rational agents in order to take a meaningful role in the polity. No amount of reasoning, it is argued, can be allowed to impeach these minimal requirements. Therefore, Gutmann argues, schools can reasonably teach tolerance and mutual respect as necessary. Feinberg argues a similar point, identifying similar values as central (2003).

Philosophically, I must make a distinction that Gutmann does not. It would be difficult to find someone willing to debunk mutual respect as a laudable goal, but tolerance is another matter. Some may point out, for example, that tolerance is not strong enough in its endorsement of pluralism, noting that tolerance connotes a certain level of dislike or belligerence. Take, for example, the description of "respect for persons" that Peters provides in his discussion:

> To show a lack of respect for a person is, for instance, to treat him in a role situation as merely a functionary, to be impervious to the fact that he, like us, has aspirations that matter to him, is a centre of evaluation and

> choice, takes pride in his achievements, and has his own unique point of view on the world. (1981, p.73)

It is important to note the active definition Peters envisions. Simply tolerating a person does not necessarily include a regard for that person's aspirations and yet Peters includes such regard in his definition. In this way mutual respect can be viewed as a more appropriate minimal framework than tolerance.

While respect is a more effective framework educators cannot, and should not, teach as if the notion of respect existed in a vacuum. Such notions must not only be understood, but also critically and rationally applied. It is certain that students taught to be respectful will run into situations in which this notion may seem to be in conflict with other values the students finds to be important. Thus the notion of rationally based, critical autonomy must be applied to mutual respect. In this way moral education can draw on the strengths of both. Practicing mutual respect as both a guiding principle and a limiting factor can strengthen autonomy. Mutual respect can, in turn, be understood best when autonomy is being practiced.

> 3. Students should, even within a highly philosophic or skeptical context, be taught the basic value of mutual respect.

4. From Respect to Mutual Growth

An emphasis on mutual respect can be viewed, as has been discussed, as a prerequisite for life in a liberal society. Respect is also, though, a highly beneficial state of affairs in pedagogic terms. Students who feel respected are in a better position to be influenced by their peers and teachers. At the same time, mutual respect allows for influence to move from teacher to student, student to student, and student to teacher. This perspective is, in a way, an extension of autonomy. Reasoning, if properly employed, can foster autonomy. True autonomy involves mutual respect. Mutual respect, properly conceived, involves mutual growth. That is to say, if a teacher truly respects students that teacher must be open to learning from them and growing with them.

Nel Noddings champions this particular point in her work on caring (1994). She argues that if we commit ourselves to the act of mutual growth we can achieve two things. One, we can meaningfully grow together. Two, we can prevent a conditioning or transmission approach to moral learning. That is to say, if educators allow themselves to be influenced by their students they can give them a chance to be part of their own education rather than simply being the subjects of such a process. Thinking back to the previous points about student autonomy and reasoning it is clear that such things require active rather than passive participation in learning.

Philosophically this is a highly valuable stance. If an educator were to adopt the opposite position, that educators teach and students learn, that educator would be presuming that educators have nothing to learn from students. As was discussed earlier this is a common feature of some moral education programs; the idea that teachers already know what is right and that their conceptions are inherently correct. Given that human understanding of virtually everything is continually evolving it would be presumptuous to take a stance the precluded current beliefs being wrong. Thus, committing educators to learning from their students and preventing simplistic transmission of moral values is a laudable pedagogical goal. For this reason it must be noted in the critical framework.

4. Moral education should involve mutual growth, between students and teachers, and should avoid static transmission of moral values.

5. From the Individual to the Collective

My growing list of positive features has developed a contradiction. If I assert that respect is necessary, how can I then add that values should not be simply transmitted, but rather critically arrived at? Is this kind of transmission not in direct contradiction to allowing students to form their own conceptions? The answer is rather simple. Respect is not to be understood to be simple or static. This term, rather, is continually evolving in scholarly understanding. The insights that today's teachers have are valuable, but respect will be defined by the understanding authored by the coming generation as much as it has been by that which preceded them. Students, as they enter the polity as adults, will co-define the boundaries of mutual respect. Thus in addition to taking positions for oneself and learning autonomous reasoning, students also require experience dealing with issues that they will need to communally engage as adults. They need to be ready not only to make decisions but to collectively deliberate as well.

This emphasis on communal thought gives birth to another idea, one that Taylor argues is essential to democracy (1989). Taylor poses that we as a society often emphasize reasoning in the wrong arena, that of the private or personal sphere. Everyone thinking critically about the same issue is a good thing, in Taylor's view, but it is not the same thing as if people actually addressed that issue communally.

The logic in this case is that if people all individually examined the same issue the discourse would merely be a competition of ideas. Much like a first-past-the-post election, it is a zero-sum equation. All of the citizens of a constituency make their own individual decision and vote. The group with the most votes wins the seat and the votes of the losing parties become irrelevant. The ideas of the many do not come together to form one better decision, rather, the ideas of the many come into conflict and the most widely supported platform wins at the total expense of the others.

Take a hypothetical classroom for example. A teacher could give a brief lesson on the age-old question of whether one should steal to feed a starving family. The teacher could then assign a personal response that asked the students to form a position on this issue and defend it. This is likely a positive learning experience for the students. They have gained some foundational knowledge and have had a chance to apply their understanding and form a critical position. This may not, however, be the most socially productive of processes. Taylor would argue that those students must have a chance to deal with that issue as a group, not just as thirty individuals operating within their own minds (1989). As Scriven points outs, democracy requires "reasoning with others", not just within oneself (1976, p.3).

Moral action often requires more than one agent. The ability to engage an issue as a group seeking the best possible collective decision is critical. It would be a mistake to believe that collective deliberation is served best by merely pitting individual conclusions against one another. To return to my election metaphor, all of the votes need to count, not just the victorious ones. The numerous rational agents must form a positive sum.

5. Students, in addition to coming to autonomous judgments, must be provided with opportunities to deliberate collectively.

6. From Cooperation to Confrontation

Within any deliberation there are conflicts. The allowing of such conflict becomes one of the critical questions of moral education. To what extent should students be allowed to clash through debate and ethical confrontation? One can easily see that over-emphasis on moral conflict can lead to some students being left out, either because they are uncomfortable with having their ideas questioned or because they are ill prepared to defend their ideas orally.

Despite such risks Eamonn Callan argues that confrontation is a necessary part of moral education (1995). He argues that moral education is difficult, no matter how an educator chooses to package it. He warns that if educators avoided such conflicts, especially over key issues, the result would be a highly problematic moral education (Callan, 1995).

What would some of the risks be of avoiding highly contentious issues? Most simply one can see that a student, robbed of the opportunity to engage in such issues, would be ill prepared to engage them in adulthood. Such a person would likely not have enough time in the adult situation to go back to learn about some of these key issues from the start, and would likely make a decision without fully understanding the issue. For example, let us say that student A attended a district that intentionally avoided highly contentious issues while student B went to a district that fostered critical engagement of all issues. Let us then say that both students became supervisors within the police service and were attempting to decide whether to allow Sikhs to wear religious headwear as part of their uniforms.

Placed in this position both would be drawing on the limits of their understanding of liberal democracy, and the limitations of civil liberty. They would also be concerning themselves with moral and ethical matters, the practical matters of law enforcement, and their own preconceived notions about Sikhs. Student A, never having been taught the complexity of such decisions, could rely more heavily on his own preconceptions about Sikhs, and on the practical implications of his decision. Student B, having discussed morality, civil liberty, and tolerance, could be able to see this issue as connected to much larger issues dealing with pluralism and diversity. Student B may also be accustomed to moral dialogue for the purpose of communal decision-making. Even if student B had forgotten much of his or her education, the student would at least know what it looked like and that it did in fact exist. Student A may never see the complex tapestry of issues connected to this decision. Thus, it can be fairly said that moral conflict is a necessary part of moral education.

6. Moral education should allow for confrontation and conflict over morals, provided that these opportunities are provided within a framework of respect.

Within these conflicts educators are bound to encounter some students who take inappropriate stances and yet support them rather vigorously. This brings up one of the key faults of conflict as a teaching tool; the difficulty in determining what limitations can be placed on diversity within classrooms. After all and educator cannot abide by sexist, racist, or other intolerant positions no matter how strongly they may be supported (though one questions how strongly supported racism can be). Thus educators should be mindful to employ conflict within the boundaries of respect.

7. From Classroom to Life

Racism and intolerance are key issues in contemporary liberal society. As a result of this such issues are likely to be manifested in the classroom, especially when matters of morality are being discussed. These manifestations are an important reminder of the connection between the world of the school and the community that surrounds it. In my discussion of positive characteristics for moral education it has become clear that good moral education involves a constant and consistent effort on the part of both the teacher and the student. This is not something that can be undertaken during a single class block or during a specific week. Moral education is an approach not just to morality, but to education in general and life itself. Just as life's problems work their way into schools, moral education must work its way into life outside of school.

The principles one will encounter and the discourses one will take part in on the way to becoming a critical agent can be seen all around any democratic society. Indeed, the questions of moral education tend to be the questions of society. One cannot claim to be moral because of one action, or one decision. Rather a moral person is one for whom morality is an important part of their person.

This is equally true for teachers. An educator cannot reasonably expect to teach morality during the day and behave in intolerant ways at night. Similarly, if educators hope to teach that all positions ought be based upon reason they cannot respond to student concerns with the classic, "because I said so". If assertions like these are not sufficient proof for student arguments, why do teachers still use such statements? The answer is that teachers often plainly ignore some of their own teachings. Such a state of affairs is unacceptable in moral education. Moral education must be an approach to living (Carr, 1991).

Teachers need to show students that the morality they develop in school must apply to life outside of school. If teachers are seen doing things that are immoral this fundamental lesson is undermined. Similarly, teachers much take great efforts to ensure they do not leave their moral teaching in totally abstract, unrealistic terms. Students must see morality in concrete actions. Thus, as the next point of my critical framework, I will add that moral education is inexorably linked with moral living.

7. Moral education must be an approach to living for teachers. Those teachers must encourage students to view it as such as well.

8. Acknowledging Complexity

The connection between moral education and moral life brings me to my last point, the notion that all moral positions are couched in some kind of social and political context (Carr, 1991). Moral education is connected to moral living, and moral living is connected to the sociopolitical context in which one lives. Carr argues that it must be acknowledged that all moral thought is grounded in this way. If anything is to be truly analyzed it must be acknowledged that even the most rational of positions is grounded in some kind of perspective.

Students themselves need to see that truth is never as simple as it seems. What may seem to be true for one may be viewed in starkly different terms by another. Educators need not teach relativism, but they must also be wary of teaching over-simplified objectivity. Questioning the origin of an idea or a worldview is highly valuable, particularly in questioning the more marginalizing and hegemonic structures of human societies. Ennis, in his guide to critical thinking, gives the following explanation:

> When thinking is focused on belief and decision, it takes place in some broad situation that gives it significance and provides some of the rules. The situation includes the people involved and their purposes, histories, allegiances, knowledge, emotions, prejudices, group memberships, and interests. It includes the physical environment and the social environment,

> which in turn includes families, governments, institutions, religions, employment, clubs, and neighborhoods. These things are relevant not only to the significance of the thinking activity and some of the rules that guide it, but also to the meaning of what the thinker is doing or judging. (1996, p.7)

Thus students ought to be equipped with the ability to examine the context, or situation of a certain belief or discussion. Such ability allows students to view their positions and the positions of others in a more effective, critical fashion. It can also help students engage the difficult connection between context and morality.

8. Moral education should involve an analysis of where ideas come from and what perspectives they are rooted in.

Concluding the Framework

Having created an eclectic framework of positive characteristics, gleaned from a reading of prominent research, I can now move on to applying this framework to my case study on character education. Before I do this, though, I will summarize my critical framework and discuss what this inquiry will contribute to moral education so as to paint a clearer picture of how I perceive the role of such a critique.

Once again, while this list does not address all potentially relevant aspects of moral education it does provide a basis for analysis. It will allow an investigation into the question of whether or not character education, as is seen in

Character Counts!, satisfies the demands made by contemporary theorists and researchers.

1. Moral reasoning should be fostered as a part of moral life.

2. A good moral education program ought to foster autonomy through the employment of critical reasoning.

3. Students should, even within a highly philosophic or skeptical context, be taught the basic value of mutual respect.

4. Moral education should involve mutual growth, between students and teachers, and should avoid static transmission of moral values.

5. Students, in addition to coming to autonomous judgments, must be provided with opportunities to deliberate collectively.

6. Moral education should allow for confrontation and conflict over morals, provided that these opportunities are provided within a framework of respect.

7. Moral education must be an approach to living for teachers. Those teachers must encourage students to view it as such as well.

8. Moral education should involve an analysis of where ideas come from and what perspectives they are rooted in.

Concluding The Chapter

Having completed the critical framework the stage is now set for my analysis itself. As I move into this analysis I wish to summarize what has been accomplished in this chapter.

The chapter began with a set of definitions for key terms; morality, ethics, value, and virtue. Once these terms were clarified I moved into a description of the nature of character education as an approach to moral education. This description led to an examination of the *Character Counts!* as a specific program of character education. Once both the general approach, and the specific program, were described I reviewed the major criticisms of both. The criticism of *Character Counts!* was provided by Peggy Geren's article which dealt with this program specifically. The criticism of character education in general was organized under three broad headings: educational critique, ethical philosophy, and reactionary worldview.

Once these shortcomings were identified I engaged in a survey some of the major alternatives to character education: Kohlbergian justice reasoning, values clarification, caring, citizenship, and spiritual-religious. This analysis not only discussed the characteristics of these approaches, but it also served to situate character education as a category of moral education, among many possible approaches.

From this broad survey of the literature I moved to the construction of a critical framework with which to examine *Character Counts!*. This framework was derived using the positive characteristics and imperatives given by an eclectic group of scholars. Its use will allow me to examine this program and determine the extent to which it meets with the expectations and contributions of education scholarship.

In addition to this examination I will engage in an examination of the data collection used to justify *Character Counts!* and the worldview that underpins it. This two-part examination will make possible the drawing of comprehensive conclusions about *Character Counts!*.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The description of the methods used in this study will be split into two broad categories: general methodology and specific subjects. Under the heading of general methodology will be a discussion of the main element of this inquiry, a normative philosophic critique. Under the heading of specific subjects will be a discussion of the rationale for the selection of *Character Counts!*, and an explanation of my intent in including an analysis of the Josephson surveys.

General Methodology

Speaking in the broadest of terms this study is a philosophic critique that focuses on normative analysis. The general philosophic methodology draws on the conceptualizations provided by Bridges, Heyting and Floden (Bridges, 2003; Heyting, 2001; Floden, 2005). The methodology within the normative analysis draws on Neuendorf's definition (2002).

Philosophic Critique

Heyting, in her discussion of methodology in philosophy of education, argues that the nature of philosophic work means that the methods of educational philosophers are perpetually contested (2001). As a result there is a broad spectrum of notions of what exactly philosophic research is, if one may even call philosophy 'research' in the contemporary sense. Indeed, as Floden points out, there are serious problems in the practice of educational philosophy (2005). His argument is that philosophy of education is often viewed as outside of 'normal' research, that it is valuable, but not as research. As a result:

> Discussions about what to do in education often gravitate toward reliance on empirical bases that seem most certain. But with that drift toward what seems like firm ground comes a narrowing of attention and an abandonment of discussions about values. (Floden, 2005, p.6)

This contention, that philosophy is not research per se, is one that philosophers of education must respond to. Perhaps the best reconceptualization is provided by Bridges when he discusses the role of philosophy in education. He argues that there are three ways to envision the relationship between the education and philosophy (2003). One may speak of "philosophizing *about* educational research, philosophizing *as* educational research, and philosophizing *in* educational research" (Bridges, 2003, p.13, italics added). This study falls under the second heading, philosophizing *as* educational research. I undertook this investigation with the underlying assumption that properly constructed philosophic investigation is a form of research that is as valuable as any other form of research, when it is directed toward problems that fall appropriately into its realm. That is to say, I use philosophic analysis to discover something about *Character Counts!* and character education.

A second key assumption within this work is that philosophy of education ought to be employed, at least in part, in the direct examination of educational programs. My philosophic analysis is, therefore, built around a normative analysis that deals directly with the materials provided by the Josephson Institute.

Thus, I employ philosophy and, more specifically, normative analysis in a single examination for the purpose of drawing conclusions not only about educational philosophy but also the practice of education itself. In short, this study works on the assumption that philosophy of education is a key tool among many other tools in educational research (Bridges, 2003). This employment of educational philosophy includes several key philosophic activities. In keeping with Bridges's notion of weaving back and forth between philosophy and other forms of analysis these activities are undertaken explicitly in some cases, and in other cases as part of other discussions (2003).

This inquiry, for example, will take a philosophic perspective as it attempts to tie the practices suggested in Character Counts! to wider philosophic problems. The hope in this philosophic activity will be to demonstrate that moral education must hold to a certain philosophic standard to be effective, and that such philosophic decisions can be readily apparent in teaching practices themselves. For example, the analysis given in the coming chapters will refer in several instances to philosophic contradictions in the teaching and research done by the Josephson Institute. In many cases one thing is identified as moral that comes in direct contradiction to another, with no corresponding rationale present. Such contradictions are key in my analysis because they indicate poorly conceived or structured moral systems, which affect student learning. This form of analysis necessitates that the researcher walk the line between philosophic analysis and what might be called pedagogical analysis. This kind of applied philosophic activity is present throughout my study. Broadly speaking, these philosophic activities fall into four categories:

- Examination and evaluation of the underlying philosophy of education within character education, and *Character Counts!.*
- Examination and evaluation of the general philosophic claims inherent in character education and *Character Counts!.*
- Examination and evaluation of the philosophic implications arising from the specific practices of *Character Counts!.*
- Examination and evaluation of the philosophic issues arising from the survey construction and data used by the Josephson Institute.

Normative Analysis as a Specific Philosophic Tool

The bulk of my analysis centers on the first three points, which dealing with the issues arising from the practices suggested in *Character Counts!.* As metioned previously the main philosophic method for engaging in these activities is normative analysis. I began this normative analysis in the previous chapter with a sampling of the key theories in moral education. I took these key theories and proceed to draw a list of positive characteristics for moral education programs. I will, in the coming chapter, use this list as a norm with which to examine *Character Counts!.* This enterprise is, of course, highly prescriptive in the way that it uses moral education literature to draw a list of features that ought to be present. This prescriptive activity is undertaken not for the purpose of yielding a set of objective data, but rather to yield a judgment based on the established norm. This type of approach, using Neuendorf's definition, situates this part of the study firmly within the confines of a normative analysis (2002).

Specific Subjects Of Inquiry

These philosophic methods and activities will be used in an examination of the surveys used to justify *Character Counts!* and the lesson plans that make up *Character Counts!*. Having discussed the broad methodology of this study I will now move into an examination of these two specific subjects. In the section on the lesson plans I will provide a rationale for the selection of a single program, and a rational for the selection of *Character Counts!* specifically. In the section on the Josephson surveys I will discuss how this data is collected, what kind of conclusions are drawn from it, and why I have selected this activity for examination.

Rationale for the Selection of One Program

Character education, like education in general, is highly complex. Terms like 'character education' or 'moral education' are imperfect categories that are created to aid in analysis and understanding. It is important not to take such terms to indicate something that exists with clear boundaries and demarcations. While some rough categories were proposed in preceding chapters, these are not to be confused with steadfast, compartmentalized, ideas.

Thus, in an effort to provide the most effective and valid critique possible, this inquiry will be highly specific. That is, it will examine concrete practices as they are proposed in a set of lesson plans within a single program. This will allow for analysis that is not only directly applicable to those considering the use of Character Counts!, but also those who seek familiarity with how moral education and character education look in specific practice.

While the deep analysis of one program fails to yield highly generalizable statements, it will bring valuable insight into a movement that is often examined in highly general terms. It will yield criticisms that can be seen both on a policy level and on the level of day-to-day teachers. A study that dealt with a broad spectrum of programs would have difficulty making comments about specific pedagogic strategies, as there would invariably be a degree of difference even in highly similar practices. Hence, a certain degree of abstraction and generalization would become a necessary reality. While such studies are academically valuable it is hoped that this work will be more specific and more directly applicable. Information on the failings of character education is highly accessible in universities in more general forms, but these forms are not fully useful for teachers who are not actively involved in university work.

Rationale for the Selection of Character Counts!

The program entitled *Character Counts!* has been selected as the object of this study for four reasons: first, it is highly utilized in public education, adult education, and training within private business ; second, it fits within the general conception of character education held within moral education research; third, it provides extensive resources for teachers that are easily available and which are widely circulated; fourth, and finally, the proponents of *Character Counts!* claim to have empirically verified the efficacy of their program, a claim I will substantiate in chapter four. I will now explain each of these reasons in full.

1) That Character Counts! is highly utilized in public education, adult education, and training within private business.

Character Counts! has a great deal of promotional material dedicated to expounding the benefits of this program. The materials range from plastic bracelets labeled with key virtues to banners and posters available for schools. Perhaps most interesting, however, is the practice of listing as many of the members of this 'coalition' as is possible. Throughout the website, pamphlets and promotional essays this group produces are extensive lists of supporters that range from *Pizza Hut* to the U.S. Army War College (Josephson Institute, 2003). Beyond this, as of 2004, *Character Counts!* was claiming that 3,500 schools had joined this 'coalition' (Josephson Institute, 2003). One coalition member goes so far as to say that over 40 million students are "reached" by *Character Counts!* (Michigan 4-h Youth Development, 2005*)*. Beyond these schools there are related character programs offered to public and private industry employees that deal with similar issues. Other programs, *WiseSkills Character Education Program* for example, do not claim the same level of broadly based support. Given that there were approximately 54 million students enrolled in primary and secondary education in the United States in 2003 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006), the *Character Counts!* coalition is claiming that approximately three quarters of students have been "reached" by this program. While no comprehensive, third party, verification of this claim is available, it is clear that a large number of schools and organizations claim to be using these methods through their membership in the coalition. The other organizations that can boast such support often do not include specific programs and function more narrowly as guiding coalitions rather than coalitions with specific instructions for practice (see *Character Education Partnership*). Furthermore, many regional character education organizations claim membership to the coalition built around *Character Counts!* (ie. The Institute for Character Education in Iowa).

2) Character Counts! fits within the general conception of character education held within moral education research.

Character Counts! is an excellent example to study because it embodies the major principles identified within character education. It has a heavy emphasis on observable, measurable behavior modification that can be seen in their choice of evaluative methods (surveys and discipline records). *Character Counts!*, like character education in general, is based on a set of values that are viewed by their proponents as universal (Josephson, 2002). Furthermore, the supporters of this program are linked to character education through their conceptualizing of social problems as being subject to individual action. That is, *Character Counts!* is based on the view that macro-level social problems are the sum of the immoral behaviors of individuals as opposed to any structural problem. In this way it fits the general definition given in my review of moral education literature. While other programs certainly meet this requirement, WiseSkills, and Creative Spirit Character Education for example, they lack the strength in popularity and available resources and literature offered by *Character Counts!*.

3) Character Counts! provides extensive resources for teachers that are easily available.

Character Counts! provides ready to order resource packages and online resources for teachers and any other group that will be using their program. This allows the researcher to obtain the same resources that a teacher might. In addition the analytical and philosophic support for this program is also readily available, making it easy for the researcher to put her or himself in the place of a teacher seeing these resources as a viable option for use in the classroom. *Character Counts!*, along with its parent organization the Josephson Institute of Ethics, provides a highly comprehensive rationale, highly visible research, and widely accessible materials.

4) The proponents of Character Counts!'s claim to have empirically verified the efficacy of their program.

The proponents of *Character Counts!* list a series of empirical studies designed to verify the efficacy of their behavior modification. They include investigations into misbehavior rates within schools, stakeholder surveys and other quantitative data on the incidents of deviant behavior. This form of support is particularly interesting to an education researcher because it fits in with a broader imperative for evidence-based practice within American *No Child Left Behind* legislation. It also carries a set of philosophic assumptions that are worth examining.

Research Methods and Character Counts!

A key feature in any examination of an educational program is an inquiry into how the supporters of such a program justify what they do. How someone collects and analyzes data, forms arguments, and interprets various relationships, all help to paint a picture of how that person sees the world. That picture is laden with values and judgments that help people make sense of the problems they face. If I am to critically analyze *Character Counts!*, therefore, I must critically analyze the methods it's proponents use to conduct their research. This analysis will yield useful insight into the worldview the authors of *Character Counts!* operate with, which will in turn yield useful insight into the foundations of *Character Counts!*.

My analysis of the Josephson Institute's surveys is based on three questions. First, are their methods of surveying an appropriate way to gather data to inform practice in moral education? Second, are their conclusions supported by their data? Third and last, do their questions reflect an identifiable bias? After identifying the key elements of my analysis I will return to these questions for a brief discussion of their specific characteristics.

To answer these questions I began by looking at the survey itself. For this analysis I used a sample copy of the survey made publicly available by the

Josephson Institute. After examining the types of questions, the wording of the questions, and the implied and explicit relationships between the questions, I then moved to examining the data tables released by the institute after each year of surveying. These tables do not include all questions from all surveys, but rather provide a sampling of some of the key sections. I then examined the press releases made after each cycle of the survey and compared the conclusions they drew in these press releases with the data tables, and the survey itself.

Is Their Method of Surveying An Appropriate Way To Gather Data To Inform Practice In Moral Education?

The question of the relationship between morality and measurable, observable data is a difficult one to answer. Any discussion of how one ought to inform moral education must wrestle with the parallel discussion of how morality is manifested in the first place. In this way, even the most empirical of questions in moral education require a high level of philosophic analysis.

Farrell, for example, cautions that definitive, direct proof of moral development is simply unattainable (2003). He argues that, as a result of this reality, educators must be humble when forming conclusions about moral learning. In keeping with this concern I have included a discussion of the assumptions made in the Josephson study with respect to the observability of moral phenomena through surveying.

Are Their Conclusions Supported By Their Data?

This discussion grows naturally from the previous discussion of the feasibility of gathering moral data through surveying. Since the Josephson Institute uses these data to make claims about moral education and student morality it is important to examine whether what they are saying is actually supported by the study they have conducted. This discussion of the validity of their conclusions, along with the related discussion of the appropriateness of their methods, will provide a picture of the methods through which they inform their practice.

Do Their Questions Reflect An Identifiable Bias?

I make the claim, through my analysis of the *Character Counts!* lesson plans, that the work of the Josephson Institute reflects a particular worldview that works to the detriment of many students. Since research methods are so closely linked to epistemology, it is possible that such a worldview could be manifested in the methods used by the Josephson Institute. In other words, the way in which the Josephson Institute structures their inquiries into morality indicates something about how they view morality. Thus, as part of my analysis of this survey program, I included an analysis of the underlying assumptions and epistemological implications that could be identified within the study.

Conclusion

This chapter is the final piece in setting the stage for my main contribution, the analysis of *Character Counts!* and the related Josephson surveys. Perhaps most important in this explanation has been the fundamental assumption that philosophy of education ought to be employed in the interdisciplinary task of improving the practice of education. From this basic imperative I have constructed a study that engages in four philosophic activities and focuses on one philosophic method, normative analysis. I sought to draw together philosophic issues, pedagogical issues, research issues and many other related tasks to form a comprehensive analysis of *Character Counts!*. This interdisciplinary examination will take shape through an analysis of several *Character Counts!* lesson plans, and the surveys conducted by its authors. With the parameters and methods of this inquiry clear, I will now move on to the critique itself.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

The preceding chapters have defined the terms of this analysis, established a review of the literature relevant to it, defined its parameters, and explained its methods. This chapter will include my analysis of the lesson plans and surveys of the Josephson Institute. It will conclude with a series of conclusions and judgments about *Character Counts!* and the methods, philosophy, pedagogy and worldview that surround it.

This chapter will be divided into three sections: an analysis of the Josephson Institute surveys, an analysis of the *Character Counts!* lesson plans, and a discussion of joint conclusions arising from both. The section on the Josephson surveys will begin with an introduction to my analysis, followed by a detailed explanation of the nature of the surveys and the way the results are used. My critique will follow this explanation and will be arranged under three headings: contradictions and construct validity, questions that ought not be asked, and fitting methods into worldview.

The section on the lesson plans will begin with a general introduction to my analysis of them. Each of the five lesson plans, arranged in order of increasing student age, will then be examined using the critical framework. Once all five have been examined, and their level of agreement with the framework judged, I will conclude the lesson plan section with a discussion of the conclusions made with all five lessons in mind. Once this has been accomplished I will move to the final of the three main sections, which is a discussion of the conclusions that tie the lesson plans and surveys together.

The Surveys

The Josephson Institute surveys serve two general functions: they are used to justify claims about student morality, and they also are used to promote and justify the use of *Character Counts!*. The claims made with respect to morality are made chiefly through press releases issued with the survey results, which I will discuss in the following pages. The use of these data to promote and justify *Character Counts!* occurs not only within the writing of the Josephson Institute but also in outside scholarship. Harms and Fritz, for example, use survey results taken in a particular case to establish the efficacy of this program (2001). It will be argued in this analysis that, for the purposes I have outlined, the methods used by the Josephson Institute are insufficient. I contend that the questioning of students in this fashion does not yield useful data on their moral qualities. To begin this analysis I will describe the nature of the survey itself.

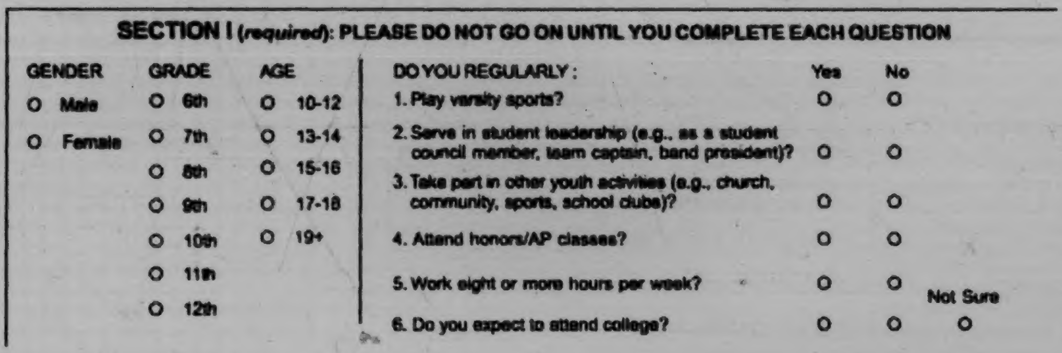
The Nature of The Surveys

In the case of *Character Counts!* the primary method of research is a nationwide survey conducted in the United States with approximately 25,000 students and called the *Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth* (Josephson Institute, 2004 & 2006b). The survey is conducted among private, public, religious and non-religious schools and is conducted by the organization which authored *Character Counts!*, the Josephson Institute of Ethics (Josephson Institute, 2004). This report card is conducted every two years with detailed data tables available near the end of the calendar year. Selections from these data tables are made public through their website. The data are reported according to grade, age, and various other school-related characteristics: involvement in sports, student leadership, other extracurricular activities, honors/AP courses, work hours, and whether or not the student expects to attend college.

The survey itself is constructed much like a large-scale satisfaction survey. There are four sections to the survey, spread over two pages (Josephson Institute, 2006b). Section 1 (see Figure 2) asks for gender, grade and age, along with a set of questions inquiring about extra curricular activities and what type of classes the student is taking. Section two (see Figure 3) includes survey questions one to twenty-five. This section is comprised of a list of twenty-five statements to which students are asked to respond using one of five options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and no opinion. Section three (see Figure 4) includes questions twenty-six to forty, it deals with student values and priorities and lists examples for students to respond to. For each value or priority students are asked to respond by filling in a bubble corresponding to one of five options: essential, very important, moderately important, unimportant, and no opinion. Added to the bottom of this section are questions sixty-one and sixty-two (see Figure 5) which give response options not available elsewhere in the survey. These two questions ask how ethical the students perceive themselves to be in the eyes of others, and how many questions on they survey they have answered dishonestly.

The final section, section four (see Figure 6), asks if students have engaged in certain negative behaviors, or if they have been the victim of such behaviors. This section includes questions forty-one to sixty. These questions give three options: never, only once, and two or more times. Added to the end of section four is a single question asking how important ethics and character are. This question, number sixty-three (see Figure 7), leaves a small box so that students may write sentence-length answers.

Figure 2 *Opening Questions to Josephson Survey*



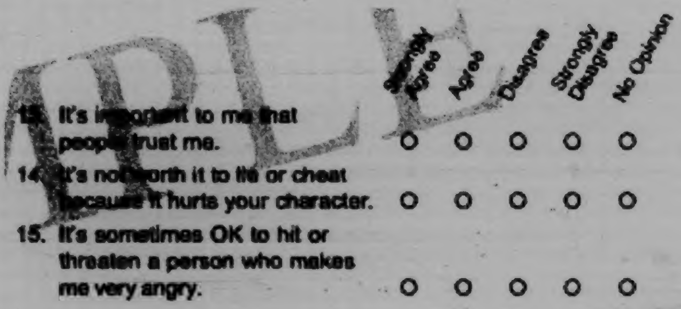
SECTION I ***(required)*****: PLEASE DO NOT GO ON UNTIL YOU COMPLETE EACH QUESTION**

GENDER	GRADE	AGE
○ Male	○ 6th	○ 10-12
○ Female	○ 7th	○ 13-14
	○ 8th	○ 15-16
	○ 9th	○ 17-18
	○ 10th	○ 19+
	○ 11th	
	○ 12th	

DO YOU REGULARLY:	Yes	No	Not Sure
1. Play varsity sports?	○	○	
2. Serve in student leadership (e.g., as a student council member, team captain, band president)?	○	○	
3. Take part in other youth activities (e.g., church, community, sports, school clubs)?	○	○	
4. Attend honors/AP classes?	○	○	
5. Work eight or more hours per week?	○	○	
6. Do you expect to attend college?	○	○	○

(Josephson Institute, 2006b)

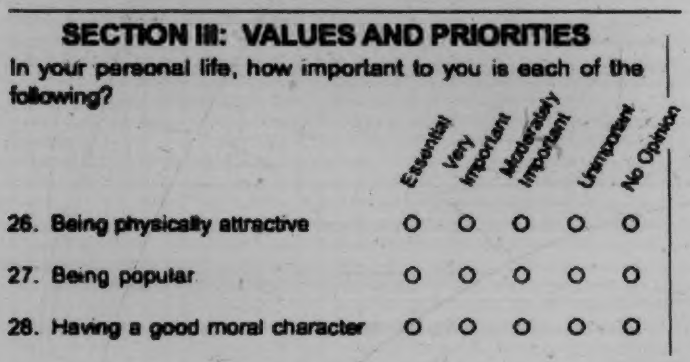
Figure 3 *Questions 13, 14 and 15*



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
13. It's important to me that people trust me.	○	○	○	○	○
14. It's not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character.	○	○	○	○	○
15. It's sometimes OK to hit or threaten a person who makes me very angry.	○	○	○	○	○

(Josephson Institute, 2006b)

Figure 4 *Opening Questions in Section Three*



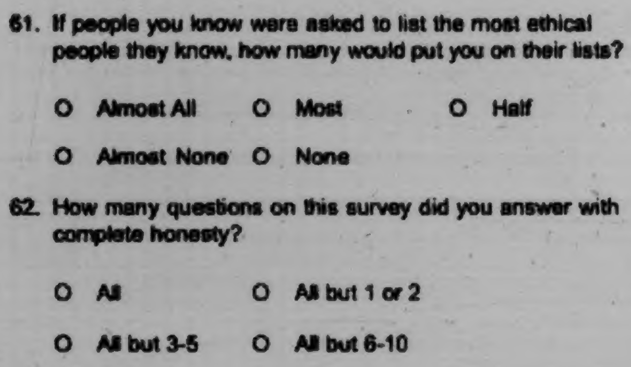
SECTION III: VALUES AND PRIORITIES

In your personal life, how important to you is each of the following?

	Essential	Very Important	Moderately Important	Unimportant	No Opinion
26. Being physically attractive	○	○	○	○	○
27. Being popular	○	○	○	○	○
28. Having a good moral character	○	○	○	○	○

(Josephson Institute, 2006b)

Figure 5 *Questions 61 and 62*



61. If people you know were asked to list the most ethical people they know, how many would put you on their lists?

○ Almost All ○ Most ○ Half

○ Almost None ○ None

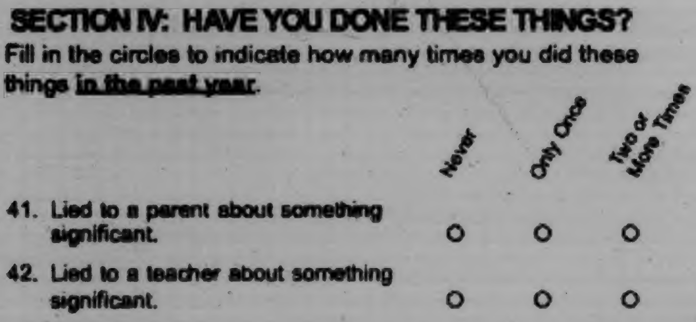
62. How many questions on this survey did you answer with complete honesty?

○ All ○ All but 1 or 2

○ All but 3-5 ○ All but 6-10

(Josephson Institute, 2006b)

Figure 6 *Opening Questions in Section Five*



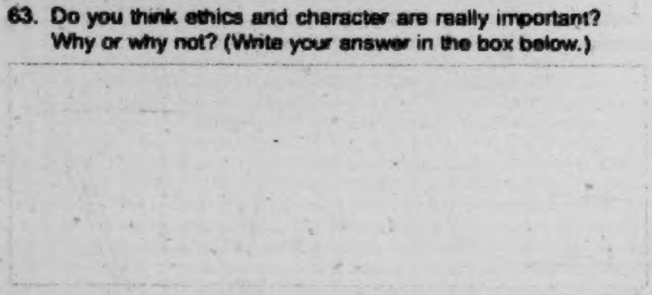
SECTION IV: HAVE YOU DONE THESE THINGS?

Fill in the circles to indicate how many times you did these things in the past year.

	Never	Only Once	Two or More Times
41. Lied to a parent about something significant.	○	○	○
42. Lied to a teacher about something significant.	○	○	○

(Josephson Institute, 2006b)

Figure 7 *Question 63*



63. Do you think ethics and character are really important?
Why or why not? (Write your answer in the box below.)

(Josephson Institute, 2006b)

Along with the annually released data is a short press release identifying some of the findings the institute determines to be particularly interesting. For the purposes of this summary a set of some of the most notable statistics are listed in the following pages, full data tables and more comprehensive summaries are available from the Josephson Institute.

These data are primarily used to make publicized statements about the state of ethics amoung American youth. For example the 2006 press release begins with the following generalizations, "Young people are almost unanimous in saying that ethics and character are important on both a personal level and in business but they express very cynical attitudes about whether a person can be ethical and succeed." (Josephson Institute, 2006a, para. 1). Conclusions like the one in the preceding quotation are present in the press releases of every survey cycle. These results are widely publicized and represent an interesting attempt at producing large-scale quantitative data for moral education. A *Google* search for the 2006 report, for example, brings up over 59,000 sites. Being such a visible surveyor of student morality lends a great deal of power to the generalizations made by the Josephson Institute. Given that this group influences organizations from local schools to the American federal government, any generalizations made in such a way have a great deal of potential to inform practice in moral education. To put it simply, when the Josephson Institute declares that theft or cheating is more or less prevalent, many educators hear about it. Take, for example, the following declarations made by the Josephson Institute after their 2004 data were released. I have included the heading to the press release and several of the highlights they identified:

> New Study of 25,000 High School Students Reveals High Levels of Cheating, Theft and Cynicism Despite Stated Convictions and High Self-Esteem Concerning Ethics, Character and Trust
>
> - 27% stole from a store in the past 12 months.
> - 74% rated their own ethics higher than those of their peers.
> - 98% said it is important to have good character.
> - When asked how many people they know would rate them as one of the most ethical people they know 85% said at least half the people they know would list them.
> - 92% said they were satisfied with their ethics and character.
> - 2/3 of males and 52% of females agreed that "in the real world, successful people do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating."

- 88% said it is very important to treat others with respect.
- 84% said it is very important to have good moral character.

(Josephson Institute, 2004)

The press release from which these highlights were taken notes that there is a serious disconnect between the "words and actions" of students. This observation is drawn from the apparent difference between the level of stated commitment to character and the large number of students who admitted to having behaved immorally. The press release also, somewhat optimistically, states that character educators have a strong base to build on in their work (Josephson Institute, 2004, para. 5). It should also be noted that they, in contradiction to many of their analytic and philosophic claims, concede that cheating and theft rates are declining according the most recent study. As another example, take these excerpts from the 2006 press release:

- Virtually all high school students (98%) said "it's important for me to be a person with good character." (Q1)
- 97% said "it's important to me that people trust me." (Q13).
- 83% say "it's not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character." (Q14).
- 94% said that "in business and the workplace, trust and honesty are essential." (Q7).
- 84% expected that half or more of all the people who knew them would list them as one of the most ethical people they know (Q61).

- 59% agreed that "in the real world, successful people do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating" (65% males, 54% females) (Q8)
- 42% believe that "a person has to lie or cheat sometimes in order to succeed" (50% males, 33% females). (Q9)
- More than one in five (23%) believe that "people who are willing to lie, cheat or break the rules are more likely to succeed than people who do not" (30% males, 16% females). (Q11).

(Josephson Institute, 2006a, p.1)

An analysis of these surveys is highly valuable if only because of the widespread publicity they garner through the Josephson Institute's far-reaching coalition. For this study, however, these surveys are also useful to give a window into the worldview and methods of the authors of *Character Counts!*. Thus, in my analysis, I have included a section on the issues that arose upon my examination of these surveys and the data which are taken from them. This analysis will shed light on the surveys, but will also illuminate connections between the surveys and the *Character Counts!* itself.

Contradictions and Construct Validity

The first point which I notice in these findings is the way in which much of the data is contradicted by other data within the survey. This calls into question both the way in which these data are used to draw conclusions about student morality, and the way in which these data are used to justify the use of their program. This point centers on the much larger question of the validity of measuring morality in the first place. The quantification of morals, or even moral perceptions, is a complicated and difficult task. The way in which the Josephson Institute surveys and analyzes such phenomenon seems to indicate that they believe they have managed to do both.

I will begin with the most obvious contradiction. In 2004 the Josephson Institute conceded that there seems to be a disconnect between some of the things the students were saying and other responses the students had given (Josephson Institute, 2004). The data from that year certainly support that conclusion, while rendering it somewhat of an understatement. 84% of students said that good moral character is important, 91% said that trusting relationships were important, and 98% said that they find it important to be a person of good character. At the same time 62% had cheated on exams, 27% had stolen in the last year, and 40% had lied to save money. As the researchers note, this seems to indicate a sizable gulf between values and actions.

The 2006 data seem to support this contradiction. Once again 98% said that it is important to have good character, 98% also said that honesty and trust are important in relationships, 97% said that "it's important that people trust me", and 83% said that "it's not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character" (Josephson Institute, 2006a). Once again statements indicating that dishonesty was required in life received high scores (59%, 42%). Perhaps more significantly 82% lied to parents about something significant, 62% had lied to a teacher, 60%

had cheated on a test, and questions about theft indicated between 20-30% of students had recently stolen from school, relatives, or businesses.

The most convenient conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that the survey is well constructed, and that it has found that people tend to hold high values and at the same time pragmatically perceive the world to be less moral than it should be. In keeping with this perception their actions may tend to be a result of their belief that immoral behavior is, in many cases, more practical. The authors of this survey interpret the situation in this way and conclude that, while there is a great deal of work to do, character education has a solid foundation on which to build (as evidenced by the high rate of reported dedication to good character) (Josephson Survey, 2004).

This interpretation is predicated on the assumption of a certain level of construct validity. One could also interpret the results to indicate some serious weaknesses in the way the survey is designed. If the survey indicates that there is a gap between what people are claiming is important and what they are actually doing one might fairly ask what value that research has for moral education. In other words, if nearly all people say that good character, honesty and trust are all important, what has been learned? In short, it has been determined that positive characteristics are, in fact, positive. These surveys merely demonstrate that if someone is asked about their view of a connotatively positive characteristic, they will support that characteristic as positive.

To further explain this I will move to an example, using the notion of honesty. If someone were honest to a fault, they might be called tactless, rude, or perhaps curt. If one were to fail to be honest they could be called dishonest. Thus, honesty tends to be the positive form of the tendency to tell the truth. It is, connotatively, a balance between telling the truth in too few cases, and telling the truth in too many cases.

Since the survey does not include any explanation of what is meant by honesty or character (or any other concept) one must assume two things: first, that people are answering based on their own connotative interpretation of the value or statement in question. Second, that they are answering in the most general of contexts, or that they are answering with a self-authored context in mind since no context has been given.

Honesty, in its more specific forms, is a highly culturally constructed notion. The more general one is in his or her explanation of honesty, the more connotatively positive honesty becomes. If one were to be specific and note that honesty included telling children that the Easter Bunny was not real, much of the vagueness would be removed and it would be possible to find out something of value about the boundaries of honesty within that person's perception. The act of defining values in a concrete fashion could take away much of the agreement over honesty. It would be reasonable to conclude that, given a more specific question, there could be a much different balance than the 98%-2% balance we see in the Josephson data.

Returning to the problem that raised this issue, the gap between stated values and actions, I can now reinterpret the findings of the Josephson Institute. Given the above analysis one could view this problem as a reflection of the construction of the survey. Very few people would disagree that honesty, vaguely defined, is important. The survey was constructed in general terms and the result yielded a general commitment to an undefined and generally positively perceived value. The fact that surveyed students view real society to be much less moral, and as a result say they behave less morally than they claim they should, is more likely a testament not only to their lack of moral action, but also to a much more complex sense of honesty. As a result of using this vague and thereby fundamentally problematic approach, the Josephson surveys fail to provide sufficient grounds for making claims about student morality. Also, since this survey is of such dubious value, its results may not be used to argue for the need for *Character Counts!*.

Questions That Ought Not be Asked

The way in which the Josephson surveys approach the definition of values is not the only point of confusion within their surveys. Both the 2004 and 2006 findings show a clear trend towards the over-estimation of one's own ethical image in the eyes of others. This leads me to yet another methodological problem within the Josephson research. In addition to asking questions that require numerous interpretations that may invalidate the conclusions they make, the survey asks questions that yield such contradictory results that one must ask why they are included.

The 2004 findings make the interesting note that 74% of students viewed their ethics as better than those of their peers. Since it is impossible for 74% of students to be more moral than the majority of their peers one obviously concludes that the students are overestimating their ethical image. To corroborate this conclusion, which the Josephson Institute does make, 83% of students believed their peers would list them as one of the most ethical people they know. This seems to be a fairly simple situation; students were asked how they think others view them and they answered in a fairly self-confident fashion.

This seemingly innocent set of questions also, however, brings up further questions of validity. It raises the question how useful it actually is to ask someone how ethical he or she is. Assuming that a reasonable number of unethical people are prone to deception or dishonesty, one could quite logically conclude that many of the people taking the survey lied. Would an unethical person not lie and claim that they were ethical? Would an ethical person not also say that they were ethical? Given that a person prone to lying could quite possibly lie, and that a person prone to the truth need not lie about being honest, is it any surprise that 92% of people are satisfied with their character?

This is a question that one can reasonably expect the Josephson Institute to have come across previously. Indeed, they seem to have responded to it with question sixty-two. This question reads as follows, "How many questions on this survey did you answer with complete honesty?" (Josephson Institute, 2006b). The options are: all, all but 1 or 2, all but 2-5, and all but 6-10. The question was obviously created as a way to gauge how honestly people answered the survey. Asking it implies that its authors recognize that at least some of the respondents have not been truthful. Given that some are not truthful, what is it about this particular question that is supposed to spur them to honesty? In the end this fundamental concern, that of honest responses to questions of honesty, is dealt with in an unsatisfactory fashion. There is no recognition of the inherent difficulty of learning about morality through self-reporting, anonymous surveys.

At this point I will, for a moment, step back and tie together what has been said thus far with regard to these surveys. To begin with, the scope of these data is far more narrow than its authors acknowledge in their sweeping biyearly conclusions. While the analysis and commentary paired with the data often declares certain trends with an air of certainty (increases in crime rates or theft etc.) these data are not gathered in a way that could reasonably warrant such a conclusion. This survey can make claims only about student perception with regard to a set of highly vague statements and not student morality itself.

Fitting Methods into Worldview

What do these surveys, and the problems associated with them indicate? The answer lies in an analysis of the connection between the methods of the Josephson Institute and their worldview. As was discussed in previous chapters, character educators tend to view ethical and moral problems as individual rather than social (Yu, 2004). Generally paired with this perspective is the belief that society is in a state of moral decay (for an example see Lickona, 1996). From these two beliefs the foundation of character education emerges. The thinking follows a pattern like this: if society is seeing a decay of public morality, and it is assumed that public morality is composed of countless individual moralities, educators must intervene to effect behavioral change in individuals. This view, commonly identified as conservative, can be contrasted with what might be considered a more leftist, progressivist perspective that would likely identify underlying social inequities and power relations as key causes and therefore key sites for future amelioration. This is not to say that character educators ignore the social. Indeed, they often note things like violence in the media as a detrimental influence. However, they tend to downplay these social factors in favour of a rather optimistic belief in the ability of each person to make better moral choices.

While such optimism is surely valuable, the way that character educators apply that belief tends to ignore some fundamental social realities (Yu, 2004). It is here that I return to the Josephson Institute's surveys. If I am to critique character educators for ignoring socioeconomic factors and other contextual information, I ought to be able to see manifestations of those approaches in the work at the Josephson Institute. In other words, their methods ought to reflect this part of their worldview.

With the exception of school-specific contextual factors (grade, age, and courses) the Josephson survey asks for only two pieces of information that could shed light on the complex intersection of socioeconomic factors, culture, language and morality. These two questions ask about out of school activities and work hours per week. While these are both important pieces of information nothing is asked about first language, nationality, class background or any of the other standard demographic questions so commonly found in large-scale social science research.

How does this connect to the worldview of character education? In the literature review earlier in this work I engaged in a discussion of the general nature of character education, one of the key features being a belief in the universality of good character. This position is commonly repeated throughout the literature of the Josephson Institute and *Character Counts!*. Thus, it should come as no surprise that they choose to ignore the collection of any data that might refute that position. If they included questions that dealt with nationality, first language, religious background, cultural background, place of birth, or other demographic questions, they risk collecting data that would contradict the notion on which they have founded their program. In addition, they would put themselves in a very difficult philosophic position.

If one were to make the claim that certain values were universal in nature, one would necessarily be forced to say that those who do not embody those things were somehow less moral, less informed or less intelligent. If they asked for background information that indicated certain cultural or social characteristics they would invariably find that one group, either through chance or some cultural difference, would give responses viewed as less moral. For example, if a statistically significant correlation emerged linking a certain religious group to a certain immoral answer on the survey, the logic of the Josephson Institute would imply that group is somehow less moral than the other groups. Given the number of other variables that could cause different responses to such vague questions, such a conclusion hardly seems warranted. But it does follow from the logic of character education. The choice of including some pieces of background information and not other pieces illustrates a connection between the worldview of character educators and their methods. They view values as universal and immune, on some level, to cultural peculiarities. This belief is reflected in the Josephson Institute's choice to avoid the common demographic questions that they may have included in their survey.

To further this point I need only look to the level of detail provided in the survey text itself. Character educators spend little time defining what their values mean in specific situations. This practice is reflected in the lesson plans, which I will discuss shortly. This belief, much like their belief in universality, also leads character educators to make certain choices when constructing their survey. In this case, it has led them to frame their questions in the most general of contexts. If one believes that honesty is universal and more or less the same in all contexts, why should a survey clearly define a context for a question of honesty? Belief in the general universality of 'honesty' has led the Josephson Institute to research honesty in highly general contexts. They are looking for a thin level of general agreement over character, so they ask only if students think character is important. No independent verification is attempted with respect to student responses and no attempt is made to clearly define the complex notion of character. Their responses, however puzzling or vaguely solicited, are taken to be an accurate reflection of their moral standards.

Issues like these that arise when examining the research methods, and connected worldview, of character education point to methodological and epistemological questions that are not dealt with by character educators. While there is certainly not enough evidence within this inquiry to warrant a condemnation of the research being done by the Josephson Institute, there is sufficient reason to problematize how this work is done. The observations made in this work indicate that this research is driven by a very specific worldview, and a clear desire to promote character education. The collection of such widely accessible and publicized data comes with significant responsibility. Such responsibility demands that issues like the ones mentioned here are dealt with. Having established the problematic nature of this research, it is now time to move to my critique of the practical suggestions given by the Josephson Institute in their program of moral education, *Character Counts!*.

The Lesson Plans

For the purposes of this analysis a sample set of lessons has been identified from those made publicly available directly from the *Character Counts!* resource website. Using these lessons I can now begin to look for pedagogical practices that might embody the eight positive characteristics outlined in my critical framework. This will be done point by point, looking at each lesson plan systematically. The lessons have been lettered A through E and are arranged in ascending order according to age level.

Lesson Set A: Age group 4-6 years old. This set is intended to teach about *trustworthiness* (Josephson Institute, 1995a).

Lesson Set B: Age group 6-9 years old. This set deals with *responsibility*. It includes a lesson plan (Josephson Institute, 1995b) and a set of activity sheets (Josephson Institute, 1995f).

Lesson Set C: Age group 9-11 years old. This set is intended to teach about *respect*. It includes a lesson plan (Josephson Institute, 1995c) and a set of worksheets (Josephson Institute, 1995g)

Lesson Set D: Age group 11-13 years old. This set is intended to teach about *fairness*. It included a lesson plan (Josephson Institute, 1995d) and a set of handouts (Josephson Institute, 1995h).

Lesson Set E: This lesson set is directed at teenagers. It is intended to teach about *caring* (Josephson Institute, 1995e).

Before I move into discussing the first lesson it is important to note that while primary students are not capable of the same kind of analysis as secondary students, it is important to begin to build towards and hint at complex moral issues so that students are not suddenly confronted in secondary school with a dramatically more complex world than they were taught existed. For example, it is important that students be taught that different people often have different views of the same thing. This does not mean that a five-year-old student needs to know how culture and language alter perception of moral issues. That five-year-old student does, on the other hand, need to know that people can disagree without any person being wrong. Timmy can think that it is fine to have a pet dog, and Sally can think it is unfair to keep a dog in a house, without either being wrong. This is an early version of the kind of cognitive process that will hopefully eventually lead to an understanding of differing perspectives. Thus as I look through this lesson I am looking for the earliest forms of these positive characteristics, and as I move into older age groups it is appropriate to raise my expectations. Having issued this warning, I will now move to examining the first lesson.

Lesson Set A

Topic: Trustworthiness

Age Range: 4-6

This lesson includes a handout, a two-page lesson plan, and an additional page that gives extra suggestions for other activities or additional at-home reinforcement. The lesson is intended for a forty-five minute block. The handout is a list of "Do's" and "Don'ts" for students to follow, while the lesson itself is a discussion about trust. In all, the lesson is intended to take 45 minutes and has as its stated objective the fostering of an awareness of behavior that creates or damages trust. The instructions for the teacher center on eleven sets of statements to be made, each followed by the soliciting of student responses. Each deals with teaching students what behaviours promote trust and what behaviors degrade that trust.

First, does this lesson encourage students to engage in critical reasoning (framework characteristic 2)? Taking the handout as an excellent example, the lessons to be learned are highly prepackaged. A list of positive and negative behaviours is provided that need only be absorbed. Students are not asked what they think of them, or when they might not work. They are not allowed to add any of their own rules, and are not encouraged to think of how the rules they are given might look in the real world. The students are simply probed to give expected answers. The teacher is instructed to ask various questions that all lead to the same follow-up discussion regardless of what the answers were. The teacher asks if the students' parents can trust them to do X, the students answer, and the teacher explains why that type of behavior is important. The ideas the students have are irrelevant unless they are part of the given script. For example:

> "What happens if your mom asks if you have seen her car phone and you say, "No" and she finds you using it to play...will you build up or tear down the trust she has for you?" (Josephson Institute, 1995a)

As one can see in the above example there is little room left for students to come to a conclusion other than the one the teacher gives. The teacher asks a question for which he or she has a clear answer in mind. Students are not given an opportunity to decide what they think of the situation or the rules themselves. Even at a primary level students need to see why rules are rules in the first place. It is far better to have a student discuss why you would want a "no stealing toys" rule than to tell them not to steal toys simply because the rule exists. The 'Do' and 'Don't' list in this lesson seems to advocate the following of rules simply because they are rules. But what does one do when a 'Do' and a 'Don't' contradict one another? For example, students are told that they should tell the entire truth in all cases. They are told this in clear, absolute language. They are also told not to say things that hurt people. Which is more important? If the truth hurts someone what do you do? This dilemma is an excellent illustration of the need to teach more than simply a list of rules. From the earliest point students need to be able to reason out even the most basic of justifications. This lesson asks for only limited forms of reasoning, confined to prepackaged question and answer sets. Dialogues of this sort, "Will lying to your mom cause her to trust you less? Yes." are not conducive to the understanding required to deal with dilemmas.

As I discussed in the section drawing this critical framework, reasoning is the basis for autonomy. Given that there are limited opportunities for reasoning in this lesson it would follow, given my previous explanation, that there would be limited opportunities for the development of autonomy. Indeed, examining this lesson there are no opportunities for such development. Students are given a series of behavioral commands, and spend the lesson learning about them and being motivated to follow them. What they think of the rules, or what rules they would add are not important. Students are treated as a set of blank slates that do not vary in any significant moral way. The lesson is designed for a group of purely impressionable youth with no valuable prior conclusions. In this way the lesson also fails to provide any kind of mutual learning or growth (the fourth point). What needs to be known is already known in its entirety by the teacher; students need only absorb and commit that knowledge to memory.

But, despite such failures, are these not good lessons for such young children to learn anyway? This lesson contains some interesting clues that deal with the third positive characteristic I have discussed, that of teaching mutual respect. Part of trust, according to the lesson's authors, is loyalty. This loyalty involves protecting "family, friends, teachers, school and community". It may seem to be a minute point but this declaration makes a critical omission. By saying that trust and loyalty are limited to people with whom you have regular contact this lesson precludes any kind of ethic for strangers outside of a given community. While one must be careful teaching very young people to trust strangers, there is certainly room for helping other children or even adults that one does not know. Defining such key moral concepts locally sows the seeds for future issues with regard to people external to your community.

Moving to the fifth critical point, do the students have a chance to discuss or come to a group decision about something? Within this lesson students are asked to give brief replies to preset questions, leaving no opportunity to learn from other students. Indeed, the lesson is arranged as a transfer of understanding from the teacher to the group of individuals rather than as a mixture of direct instruction, participation, discussion and deliberation. As a result of this transfer-style approach students are not given the chance to talk about how some of the "Do's" and "Don'ts" overlap and conflict. In this way not only does this lesson fail to embody any meaningful collective discussion, it also fails to allow for any moral confrontation or conflict (points 5 and 6).

But what does this lesson do well? What would moral educators likely find to be positive about this plan? First and foremost it seems to do a very good job of teaching students to see morality in everyday life. The lesson focuses on having students identify ways in their private life that they can embody trustworthiness. This is an important cognitive task, especially from the perspective of character educators, because it is an attempt at bridging the gap between what is being said in school and actual behaviour. That act of asking a student how they can demonstrate trustworthiness helps that student construct that value within their own day-to-day lives. Nearly the entire lesson focuses on encouraging students to think about manifesting trustworthiness in their lives. This is accomplished through a building block metaphor the teacher uses to explain how some actions take blocks of trust away from you and how some add them. Thus, given this focus, it is fair to say that this lesson satisfies the seventh point by dealing with the connection between values and moral living.

The lesson also deals with the eighth point rather well, although in a dramatically altered way that fits with the age level being targeted. The eighth point or positive characteristic was written to indicate the positive nature of the analyzing of moral perspective. More specifically this is referring to the notion that on some level students should be made aware that people disagree on moral issues. Within character education it is reasonable to expect that this be done with the caveat that certain things are universal, while their application or specific contexts may be up for debate. This lesson does something rather different with this idea that seems highly appropriate for young children. Within the lesson students are asked how other people (generally parents) would react to actions the students would likely find acceptable, things like sweeping toys under the rug as opposed to actually cleaning. This portion of the lesson addresses the key notion of basic differences in perspective. What one person might find acceptable, another might find unacceptable. This is a key lesson that can be built upon in later grades that leads to more complex understandings of individual worldviews. This is done within a very narrow perspective, however, and it is important to note that whenever students are asked about the perspective of another person it is that of an adult who is shown later as morally right.

Having examined this lesson for each of the eight positive characteristics one sees that while this lesson manages to encourage moral living and a consideration of the views of others, this is done within a fairly narrow framework that allows little in the way of student centered learning. To put it succinctly, the "Trustworthiness" lesson fails on counts one through six, and satisfies counts seven and eight.

Lesson Set B

Topic: Responsibility

Age Range: 6-9

This set of lessons, which deal with the nature of responsibility, are intended for a forty-five minute block. The focal point of the lesson is a game that has students working to learn the definitions of a set of terms that deal with responsibility. The words range from the more typical moral notions like duty and reliability to less obvious ones like thriftiness and recycling. The game has students holding up a strip of paper that has either a term or a definition on it. They try to match up with other students according to the correct definition pairings and then are asked to come up with a way to be responsible that starts with the same letter or sound as their partner's name. The lesson ends with the students sharing these ideas and then doing a rhyming exercise that follows the following script. After this lesson ends they are encouraged to practice this chant at home:

> One, Two! Do your best in all you do!
> Three, Four! Do your part then do some more!
> Five, Six! Don't blame others for your fix!
> Seven, Eight! Set a good example and be first rate!
> Nine, Ten! Make a mistake so try again!
> (Josephson Institute, 1995f, p.1)

This lesson also comes with a set of suggestions for future activities much like the trustworthiness lesson did. These suggestions range from forming words on the floor using students as letters, to doing jobs that require cooperation. The stated objective is to make students aware of their responsibilities.

This lesson is very similar in structure to the one from the previous age group. The key difference seems to be the addition of more advanced content in the form of a set of definitions to be learned. As a result of this the lesson seems to fall prey to many of the same issues that the previous one did. To begin with, little is done in the way of forming an opinion or any creative ideas. The point of the lesson is to make students "aware", not engage in any higher-level reasoning. The only reasoning students are to engage in deals with giving examples to ideas they are taught. While this is a useful exercise such activities can also be built upon to form more meaningful opportunities for student decision-making. This is not the case in this lesson. Students could have, for example, been asked to define what they think responsibility means or what responsible people do. If this was done in a previous lesson they could be asked to identify what they think their responsibilities are. Once again students are assumed to have no meaningful conclusions to contribute. Thus, much as the last lesson did, this lesson fails to allow for opportunities for the development of reasoning or autonomy.

Are the students taught mutual respect? While the list of "responsibility words" includes several values that can be fairly labeled as cultural and economic rather than moral (self-reliance, thriftiness) responsibility seems to be defined as an individual notion. There are several terms that include avoiding negative action towards others but there is little that even implies a positive form of responsibility towards others. This lesson teaches a passive tolerance, as opposed to active mutual respect. For example, being responsible, in this lesson, apparently includes not being a burden to others. But what about those who are a "burden" through no fault of their own? Do responsible people have any obligations towards them? Are those burdensome people irresponsible? The implication in this case is that they are. Surely the authors of this lesson do not intend to say this, but their inclusion of self-sufficiency as a key part of responsibility raises serious concerns that they do not address. By failing to deal with this omission this lesson fails to deal with responsibility toward others, and in doing so seems to imply a certain level of intolerance within a individualist model of self-reliance. Thus, in this case, the lesson fails to teach a truly inclusive model of mutual respect.

Much as was the case in the previous lesson, "Do's" and "Don'ts" are identified and the entire lesson is presented as a static package of ideas that need to be transferred, rather than examined. The addition of the chanting exercise adds to the highly indoctrinatory image this lesson puts forward. Students taking part this lesson would be learning responsibility in much the same way one would learn an exercise routine or a military parade drill. As a result of this the responsibility lesson most certainly fails to embody my fourth characteristic, that of opportunities for mutual growth.

One of the ways that this lesson could have avoided static learning, while still teaching the 'core' value, would be to allow students to discuss what they think of responsibility. What does it mean, what does it look like, and when is it confusing? In this lesson student participation is much the same as it was in the previous age group. Students are given highly limited opportunities for taking part in their learning and are relegated to giving examples for prepackaged concepts. This lesson, therefore, also fails to embody the fifth point by not providing collective decision-making opportunities. In omitting any kind of critical discussion it also fails to discuss what kinds of conflicts can occur over notions of responsibility. This value is presented as a static concept devoid of any ambiguity and immune to any dilemma. I would argue that responsibility is an important value to see as contested. There are many questions within the notion of responsibility that must be dealt with as early as is possible. Who are we responsible to and why? Do you have any responsibilities to your parents that you do not have to someone else's parents? These questions, if students' answers are respected freely, can spur some of the dialogue that can give students early experience with moral conflict.

Once again, however, *Character Counts!* manages to ignore many of these nuances and rather focuses a great deal on how the desired behaviors look in real life. While they narrow their focus away from understanding the complexities of day-to-day moral life they do provide plenty of practice thinking of how responsibility becomes manifest in that life. So long as the situation appears unambiguous to students, they are likely to know what the responsible thing to do is. One must, however, ask how useful it is to teach students what do to in only the clearest of situations. Similarly, this lesson also fails to provide any discussion or instruction as to differing perspectives or views of responsibility. Thus students are apt to think that responsibilities are the same for all people and are always obvious. Even from a universalist perspective it is valuable to examine how different people or cultures may interpret those values.

I am then left with one point of eight that this lesson satisfies, that being the seventh point. It is important to note, though, that even that point is dealt with within a very limited, narrow context that is devoid of complexity and ambiguity.

This inquiry has still not seen any attempt at giving students an introduction to any higher-level thinking. The learning in both of the lessons thus far examined has been entirely dependent on the teacher and has not attempted to prepare students for difficult situations.

Lesson Set C

Topic: Respect

Age Range: 9-11

This lesson's stated objective is as follows, "Participants will focus on four factors in respecting others by creating "Respect 911" skits on assigned topics" (Josephson Institute, 1995c, p.2). The lesson instructions give four different scenarios for groups of students to use to create skits. In each case something is happening that can be solved or alleviated by showing respect. For example, one group of students are to create a skit in which they "rescue" a student who is ignored as a result of not being one of the popular students. The theme of the lesson is this notion of rescuing through respect. At the conclusion of the lesson the students are told that when they hear a siren or see a reference to 911 on television they are to think about respect and being part of a respect rescue team.

Once again this lesson is built around a highly prepackaged set of moral ideas to be learned. A list of "Do's" and "Don'ts" is included again, worded in the same way as was the case with students half the age of the ones being targeted. To address the second point of the framework, the opportunities for students to employ reasoning are once again highly limited, if present at all. The students are asked to think of ways to embody respect through the skits, but are not given a chance to articulate where they stand on any issue of respect or what issues may arise in thinking about respect. Indeed, in this lesson at least, they are not shown that the notion of respect requires any meaningful critical dialogues. Students are simply applying the notion of respect, given to them as static, to situations provided for them. The questions provided on the worksheet that goes with the skit simply ask the procedural questions required to create a skit, for example, "How will you set the scene?". They do not probe the student's previous knowledge or understandings. They certainly do not encourage the forming of any new position. As a result, this lesson also fails on points one and two.

While it is done in a highly static way, this lesson does manage to directly address mutual respect. A significant part of the list of "Do's" and "Don'ts" is dedicated to encouraging tolerant behavior. It expressly mentions that one should avoid discrimination and even mentions socio-economic status and physical condition. This becomes another point of confusion, though, as students in a previous age group were taught that self-sufficiency was a key part of responsibility. Given that in previous lessons self-sufficiency and thriftiness were considered key qualities it is important to note the emphasis made here on judging people based on merit. While the link is faint, this emphasis on self-sufficiency, thriftiness, and merit indicates a parallel between character education and right-wing politics along the lines that Yu identifies in his discussion of political control (2004). By working economic values like thriftiness into 'core' values it becomes possible to define a group's own political beliefs as 'core' to ethical living. Take self-sufficiency, for example. It is not difficult to see how a person writing from a Western-capitalist context might find self-sufficiency to be a key aspect of responsibility. Outside of that context, however, others may view self-sufficiency to be less important than notions like interdependence. The addition of notions like thrifitiness, self-sufficiency and merit give this program an individualistic message that promotes, knowingly or unknowingly, the values of capitalist society. Thus, for the purposes of my framework, I will acknowledge that while tolerance is encouraged students are left merely with the notion of individualistic tolerance, as opposed to the more active or communal 'mutual respect'.

As for points four and five, this lesson provides a highly static, and yet vague, definition of respect that does not seem open to discussion. Students are asked to deliberate, but only about the comparatively inconsequential parts of their skits. They are not asked to go into any depth of analysis beyond simply performing a skit that applies the lesson's view of respect. These points, then, must surely fall on the side of not being fulfilled in this lesson.

Moving on to the sixth point, does this lesson allow for conflict over morals? One can reasonably see that students may stumble upon a valuable disagreement when authoring their skits but it would be by chance, not design. The vagueness of the definition, coupled with the superficial nature of the questions on the worksheet ("What will your characters say?") ensure that the skits will likely gloss over any depth and provide a fairly contrived picture of respect as it would appear in the real world.

As with the previous lessons this one spends nearly all of its time seeking to enact behavioral change with minimal deeper understanding. While the skits are not likely to reflect actual situations (one struggles to imagine a student forming a respect rescue team to save an unpopular cohort) they would likely at least remind students of the need for respect. How long this association would last is a psychological question, but one can surmise that without any real engagement with the issues as they actually appear this lesson may very well fail to enact that change. Thus I will, somewhat skeptically, record that this lesson does attempt to show respect as part of a moral lifestyle (point 7).

This lesson is so vague with respect to what it is specifically teaching it would be difficult to satisfy my eighth point, that of dealing with perspective. As has been seen repeatedly, character educators attempt an impartial, universalist stance and end up in a very vague position. Once again, it would be possible to discuss how some people may see certain aspects of respect differently. This lesson does not at all recognize that disagreement exists. Given that the skits involved responding to a problem there is an opportunity, if it is fostered through the lesson's design, to direct the students towards meaningful differences of opinion so that, in addition to knowing that such issues exist (point 8), they have a chance to discuss as a group what they think about those decisions (point 5).

This lesson has left point seven met, somewhat minimally, and the remainder of the points unmet. After having seen three of the five lessons there is a pattern developing that seems to corroborate what was argued in my discussion of the flaws of character education. Thus far the only point that has been consistently, or perhaps even competently, developed has been the seventh one. These lessons certainly spend a great deal of time illustrating how core values fit into lived experience. This is done in a particularly narrow, and generally vague, fashion.

Lesson Set D

Topic: Fairness

Age Range: 11-13

This lesson set deals with fairness in much the same way as respect was dealt with in the previous age category. Students are given a skit for a group of five students to act out for the class. The skit is a discussion between friends that has the characters complaining that their parents do not treat them fairly; as they do this the students say how they have been behaving around the house and effectively demonstrate that they are the ones being unfair, and not their parents. The theme of the discussion can be fairly summed up with the following quotation, “If my little brothers and sisters bug me and take my stuff, it’s okay. But let me try and get back at them and I get in terrible trouble! I was grounded for three weeks for stuffing my pesky little brother’s soccer ball into the microwave. I didn’t mean to push the start button!” (Josephson Institute, 1995h, p.1).

Once the students have read the skit the class goes over the “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for fairness. The students then rewrite the script in groups, attempting to work the “Do’s” and “Don’ts” into the behavior of the students in the script. Once again there is a worksheet that has several questions for the students to go over as they work on their scripts.

It is not difficult to recognize a pattern here. There is very little variation between the way each value is taught. Much the same is true of each age category, and there is little difference in the basic teaching methods. This lesson about fairness differs from previous ones only insofar as the language and concepts become slightly more mature. Little about the structure or methods of the lesson has changed. Thus I am once again faced with much the same result when addressing the critical framework.

Points one and two, encouraging students to practice critical reasoning and develop in autonomy, are once again ignored in every meaningful sense. Students are not encouraged to create or personally engage, but rather to apply knowledge from one worksheet to another. While this may be acceptable for the younger years one can reasonably expect the levels of thinking to increase as the age level increases, within this sample it has not. Speaking specifically of the fairness lesson a golden opportunity arose, within one of the worksheets, for students to practice reasoning and forming their own stances. Question six on the “Family Fairness Worksheet” introduces the notion of equity and equality. It briefly defines them and then proceeds to assert that fairness means equity, not equality. This is most definitely a reasonable position, and it fairly addresses the third point by addressing equity. By defining this relationship for students, however, this lesson wastes a valuable opportunity to engage students in what is a defining question in plural societies. To what extent should people be treated equitably over equally? What are the limits of equitable treatment? While this is clearly a highly complex discourse it is certainly one that, properly taught, can be seen within the day-to-day experience of students. Thus this lesson fails on points one and two, and succeeds on point three.

The focus on applying directly taught knowledge also puts this lesson in the fail column with respect to avoiding purely static moral transmission. No attempt is made at adding something from the student's understanding to the analysis. Indeed, the stated objective of the lesson is to apply the "Do's" to the skit situations. Once again the students are asked to work collectively, not to create their own ideas but rather to apply the ideas given to them. In this way the fairness lesson ignores points four and five.

By glossing over the equality/equity debate this lesson also gives up a key opportunity to facilitate moral conflict (point 7). Furthermore, this lesson emphasizes that decisions can and should be made impartially. While few would argue for inappropriately biased judging it is also important for moral educators to note that impartiality is viewed as highly contentious and far from certainly achievable. Another key opportunity is lost in ignoring this complexity and, in doing so, this lesson fails to meet the eight point (dealing with perspectives).

Once again *Character Counts!* has created a lesson that fails to meet most of my criteria, but that clearly addresses the notion of values being connected to a way of life. In the exact same way as was the case in previous lessons students are asked to work with contrived situations intended to illustrate a connection between *Character Counts!* and life at home and outside of school. While it must be admitted that this lesson meets the requirement of the seventh point, this must be done with yet another caveat.

If one were to closely examine this consistent focus in *Character Counts!* (the teaching of values as a visible way of life) it is clear that several issues arise. Speaking about this lesson in particular (the others will be summarized at the conclusion of the chapter) one is forced to ask how thoroughly the Josephson Institute has researched this work. If the point of the skits is to show students how fairness works in their own lives it would make sense to have those skits relate somehow to their lived reality. One of the keys ways to do this is by using their language. Much as it was somewhat dubious to encourage students to form respect rescue teams in the previous lesson, it is somehow difficult to see a modern 11-13 year old saying the things the skit has them saying. For example, one of the characters asks, "Parents are awfully hard to figure, aren't they?" while another adds, "Let's face it! We really have it rough at home. There must be some way we can find a little fairness in our families!". This kind of language is significantly different than that of contemporary students. Thus the teacher is left with an exercise that has one fundamental strength, its focus on connecting values to life. This strength, though, is greatly weakened by the fact that no attempt is made to connect to the language and culture of the target audience.

To compound this issue the subtext of the lesson is that parents are more fair than students think, and that students need to act more fairly. Thus, this amounts to a lesson written from the perspective of parents, in the language used when those parents were themselves children. One is left to ask how this is supposed to truly connect with students on a level that will change their views and behaviors. Needless to say it is not likely to. As I move into the lesson intended for teenagers it will be interesting to see if this notoriously difficult to understand demographic is any more accurately addressed.

Lesson Set E

Topic: Caring

Age Range: Teenagers

This final lesson is aimed at teenagers and has as its stated objective the experiencing and discussing of exclusion and caring as they apply to the lives of students. This is done using a musical hand-holding game where students hold hands into groups as the teacher declares a number of people needed for a group. The idea is that every time the students form a group there will be several left out which will allow the students to experience exclusion. This is used as a segue into a discussion of how exclusion feels and how it occurs in school. During the discussion the students refer to a handout outlining the *Character Counts!* definition of caring along with some other key ideas like the golden rule, stakeholders (people influenced by decisions), caring versus duty and the omnipresent “Do’s” and “Don’ts” list.

At first look this lesson would appear to embody many of the ideas that have been lacking in the previous lessons. The content appears more complex, more questions are asked of students, and a few key ideas are directly addressed that have been lacking in previous lessons from my sample. After a close reading, however, the same issues generally arise in this lesson as did previously. Take, for example, the related points about getting students to practice reasoning and develop as autonomous agents. After the hand-holding exclusion game students are asked what it means to be a caring person. This question holds a great deal of potential if students are actually able to form an idea of what a caring person is, communicate it, and evaluate it. The instructions for this part of the lesson, however, ask the teacher to solicit caring words and feelings to write on poster paper. After this term gathering activity the teacher gives a preconceived definition of a caring person anyway, "A caring person considers how a decision, word or action will effect others." (Josephson Institute, 1995e, p.3). This is a particularly apt example of how a question with great educational potential can be turned into a fairly empty exercise devoid of meaningful critical thought. The teacher takes a highly valuable philosophic question, solicits the most narrow answers possible, and then proceeds to answer the question without actually using the discussion. In this way students are robbed of any chance to develop critical reasoning, and are similarly not allowed an opportunity to form a dissenting opinion.

As for my third point, that of teaching mutual respect, this lesson addresses it superficially. The teacher essentially asks if something like race is a fair reason to lower standards of caring, the teacher is then asked to refer to the list of caring words, and wait for the obvious response from students. While tolerance is addressed it is not examined or discussed in any useful fashion. Mutual respect itself is not satisfactorily dealt with, and at the end of the day the teacher has simply told the students not to discriminate. This is likely not new information for students, and barring any actual analysis or meaningful learning experience they are not likely to take anything out of such a superficial question.

Much as has been the case in all of the previous lessons the students are not an active part of their learning. They are subjected to a static transmission of values in their teenage years just as much as in they were in their earliest grades. This lesson, more specifically, includes the same kind of "Do's" and "Don'ts" list as every other lesson. It is even phrased in the same way as the kindergarten aged list. Instructions like "Don't be cruel" are preceded by an unhappy faced graphic. The only times where students have input are when the teacher is soliciting responses to questions that don't change the lesson. The students simply come up with words to reinforce prewritten conclusions. The lesson concludes, for example, by having students think of things they could do to behave as they have been instructed to once they have left the class. This type of input is something akin to saying that a prisoner is free to eat their dinner where they want to, so long as it is within their cell. Both have been given input that is, at best, superficial. Both have been robbed of agency.

As teenagers these students are either several years, or several months, away from being able to take a full adult role in society. Does this lesson develop the skills they will need to make moral decisions as adults, and as citizens? The answer is a resounding no. The students do not have an opportunity to hear the critical perspectives of any of their colleagues and have no chance to voice any kind of disagreement. Their interactions are highly regulated and leave little room for meaningful discourse. Differing perspectives are neither heard, nor addressed. This is likely due to the fact that the Josephson Institute believes the "Golden Rule" is sufficiently universal that it removes the need for any discussion of further complexity. With only point seven left to examine, this lesson has met only one point, that being the third point about mutual respect.

As for point seven, this lesson does attempt to show that caring needs to be part of life. This is done, however, using a set of highly contrived situations. Take the following for example,

> "As a closing activity, stand and form groups of 4 or 5 people. An important part of caring is helping people see their strengths. Without speaking, think of a good quality you've noticed in each of the other people in your group. Start with the person who lives nearest where we are. Look him or her in the eyes, touch his or her arm or shoulder, and tell what good you've observed in him or her. That person will look you in the eyes and say "Thank you," then receive and accept compliments from the other two or three people. Repeat for everyone." (Josephson Institute, 1995e, p.3)

This kind of activity is not likely to form a lasting connection in the minds of the students between caring and their day-to-day lives. The way this activity is constructed seems more like how one would *train* someone as opposed to *educating* them. One wonders what a teenager will get out of being told to touch someone on the arm, look into their eyes, and compliment them. The ones who take it seriously are likely the ones who already know what caring is about. The ones who truly need such a lesson are unlikely to buy-in to this kind of interaction. Furthermore, what does this lesson teach about being genuine and honest? Do forced compliments make for good people? Certainly not. So, in closing, it will be recognized that this lesson addressed the connection between values and moral living. This will be done, as in the previous lessons, with the caveat that the lesson does so highly superficially using such contrived situations and examples that they are likely to be irrelevant to actual students. This brings this lesson to success on two of the eight points, namely the third and seventh.

Lesson Plan Results

Figure 8

Summary of Normative Analysis

Lesson	Point 1	Point 2	Point 3	Point 4	Point 5	Point 6	Point 7	Point 8
Trustworthiness (4-6 years old)	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Met
Responsibility (6-9 years old)	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Unmet
Respect (9-11 years old)	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Unmet
Fairness (11-13 years old)	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Unmet
Caring (teenagers)	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet	Met	Unmet

Figure 8 includes the results for each lesson with respect to each criterion. The use of the term 'met' indicates that the lesson met the requirements identified in the critical framework, while 'unmet' indicates that it was lacking in that regard. Speaking of these numbers for a moment, each of the five lessons was examined with eight positive characteristics in mind. Out of forty possible fulfillments only eight emerged. Those eight came exclusively from points three, seven and eight. That is to say, at least one lesson met the demands of moral scholarship, even minimally, when dealing with mutual respect, the nature of moral life, and moral perspective. None of the lessons met expectations with respect to forming moral positions, employing reasoning, avoiding static transmission, providing opportunities for collective deliberation or moral confrontation. Only one criterion was met consistently, that of dealing with morality as a way of living. It is now appropriate to examine some of the general trends that emerged across the lessons, values and age categories.

One of the more predictable issues that emerged was that of placing behavior management over growth. As was previously discussed, character educators are often accused of trying to simply change how people act without worrying about their deeper growth in moral understanding. This is certainly the case in this *Character Counts!* sampling. Students were told how to behave through lists of positive and negative behaviors (Do's and Don'ts). They were often asked to look at a skit or script and identify which behaviors were "Do's" and which where "Don'ts". At the end of the lessons parents were often encouraged to spot and reinforce positive behaviors with praise. The lessons examined in this study consistently seek to alter behavior with a minimal emphasis on the thinking that leads to the behavior change.

To corroborate this conclusion figure 8 shows that any maturation or development of reasoning is ignored in all five lessons. None of the criteria that deal with actually reasoning something out, or learning something from another student, were met. No attempt is made to prepare students for moral dilemmas that require more than simple "Do's" or "Don'ts", nor is an attempt made to make students comfortable with ambiguity.

In keeping with this disregarding of reasoning it is clear that the sample does not allow for any growth over age groups. Within the given sample there is no increasing of emphasis on reasoning or critical thinking. Rather, the level of docile transmission evident in ages four, five and six is present until the conclusion of the program in the teenage years. Since it is reasonable to expect a teenager to form his or her own position on a moral issue why was there not evidence, in any of the lessons, of teaching that would encourage this? Reasoning was consistently limited to providing examples for ideas the teacher presented.

One possible answer to this question is that *Character Counts!* may well be more of a reaction than a program of education. Some of the lessons sought to foster capitalist values like self-reliance, some clearly sought to legitimate parental authority, and all of them encouraged docile compliance. The lesson plans consistently indicate this reactionary political background. For example, the caring lesson plan begins with a lamenting of how VCRs are part of a trend toward immoral behavior;

> "We've gone from social visits to video games and the VCR. It's as if we're so overwhelmed by the needs around us that we've built invisible walls, blocked our vision of other people's problems, and focused on ourselves. It's different with ethical people. They care." (Josephson Institute, 1995e, p.1).

Despite the dubious nature of the claim that of the personal video recorder is part of a trend away from being "ethical people", one can begin to see how this parade of bleak moral claims links back to the theory character education started with. With statements like these character educators paint a sweeping picture of the end of ethical behavior, evidenced by children putting soccer balls in microwaves, and people moving away from moral communities to lead insular lives centered around personal video recorders. As a result, the educational program they create is a response to the perception of immorally raised children in a bankrupt world. In keeping with this fear this program treats freethinking and critical analysis as unnecessary and instead focuses on the changing of behaviors themselves as if such change could be enacted superficially.

Part of what makes *Character Counts!* unique is that it advocates overt education in values during school time specifically set aside for character education. This can be seen in contrast to approaches that teach morality as part of all subjects. This notion is ostensibly so that more can be done than would be the case if character was left to chance or relegated to a secondary priority. The fascinating thing about this is that *Character Counts!* takes that time and does very little with it. They leave their key concepts hopelessly vague, ignore any kind of moral thinking process, ignore the ideas the students themselves bring, and they ignore any complexity and depth to moral issues. Indeed, they generally ignore the very existence of such issues.

The reason that *Character Counts!* requires time specifically set aside for character instruction, as opposed to integrated in the regular curriculum, is that it is better understood as a program of moral indoctrination rather than moral education. Feinburg argues that indoctrination involves teaching that actively avoids growth from dependence (2003). Since no attempt is made in these lessons to foster any kind of independence from "Do" and "Don't" lists, they can fairly be called indoctrinatory under the Feinburg definition. This type of teaching requires time because it must be repeated and reinforced over and over to have any lasting effect. In much the same way as an overplayed advertisement is locked into one's mind *Character Counts!* aims at saturating students with behavior imperatives while it avoids the skills and analysis that would allow students to actually buy-in to those imperatives.

Presuming, for a moment, that one agreed that the moral crisis claimed to exist actually does exist. Let us furthermore agree, for argument's sake, that teaching reasoning and critical thinking does not help foster morality and that a series of repeated moral imperatives with reinforcing activities could actually work. One would still need to make sure that program of imperatives and reinforcement actually affected the target ("target" seems a more appropriate term for students subjected to *Character Counts!*). Even with such a lenient hypothetical example, *Character Counts!* fails to stand as a defensible set of practices. This sample clearly indicates a complete disregard for how students communicate and construct their world and thus makes little attempt at making its behavior modification fit with the targeted audience.

The language used in the lessons when a script or skit is required frequently resembles the language of previous generations decades past. It uses terms almost certain to convince students that the examples are not from real people. The passing comments about video games and the dangers of the VCR reinforce the idea that the authors of *Character Counts!* have no idea how young people think or how they construct their world. This could be why their surveys include a one-sentence box for student comments, they simply don't seem to have the time to actually adjust to more effectively meet the students in their own world. *Character Counts!* teaches students that moral people are absurdly unrealistic. Moral people, in this program, walk up to other people, touch their arm and look them in the eye, and compliment them. Moral people form respect rescue teams. Moral people realize that parents are not unfair, and that students are. Moral people refer to lists of good behaviors and follow them to a tea because they have never learned what to do if the list doesn't cover their problems. Moral people say that parents are hard to "figure". One could certainly make that case that not one of these things is a requisite for moral life.

The Cycle of Moral Vagueness – Joint Conclusions

Having examined both the surveys and the lesson plans of the Josephson Institute I now move to the final section of this chapter, a brief discussion of the connection between the conclusions from the surveys and *Character Counts!* itself. In the end, all of the issues and problematic practices I have identified in these practices fit into a self-propagating system authored by the Josephson Institute. This is not to say that some sort of dishonest work has been done. Rather *Character Counts!* is simply an ill-conceived solution to a dubious problem founded more in perception than good scholarship. That perception is reinforced with research designed to support the worldview of both *Character Counts!* and the moral doomsayers warning of imminent moral decay. Character educators warn that society is becoming more and more immoral. The Josephson Institute, as a result of holding this perception, constructs a vague survey to demonstrate that people see the world becoming immoral and that students often do immoral things. They ask liars if they lie, and then ask how many times they have lied. They avoid asking any questions that could threaten their faith in universal values, and then use the results of this vague survey to support the use of similarly vague teaching programs. What they do not note, however, is that even if a teacher gives this survey before and after the use of a program that teacher is never testing character but rather the extent to which someone claims to do or not do certain things.

Similarly the Josephson Institute often cites changes in crime rates and school discipline problems in schools that use their programs. What they do not acknowledge is the other variables that might effect those changes, or the contextual information that could give those findings meaning. A researcher is, therefore, left with a set of highly suspect conclusions and little to examine with respect to the methods used to arrive at those conclusions.

Between the various validity issues in their research, the obvious neglect of numerous positive teaching practices, and the overstating of virtually every positive aspect of their work, *Character Counts!* and the Josephson Institute simply do not put in the work needed to make the claims they make. If character education is as powerful as its supporters claim it is, educators should be very concerned with the prominence of such a dubious set of solutions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING REMARKS

This inquiry was undertaken primarily to come to a judgment about the use of *Character Counts!* as an instrument of moral education. In pursuing this judgment various related discussions and questions arose which contribute not just to discussion of *Character Counts!*, but of character education as well. I will, thus, conclude this work with a discussion of the implications this study has for *Character Counts!*, and for character education. Before I discuss these implications, however, it is useful to take a moment to review how this thesis has arrived at its implications.

This work began with a discussion of the background of character education and *Character Counts!* itself. This discussion led to a review of the key criticisms and issues that arise from the practice of this program and character education in general. This discussion introduced many of the commonly identified weak points within these notions, including their problematic view of the teacher-student relationship, their use of "core" values, and their particularly bleak and individualistic view of contemporary society.

This discussion led into a summary of the major categories of alternatives to character education including an avoidance of moral education, Kohlbergian justice reasoning, values clarification, the caring approach, the religious-spiritual approach, and the citizenship approach. Once these were accounted for I reviewed some of the key notions identified by scholars in this area and used them to draw a critical framework with which to evaluate programs of moral education.

I established this normative philosophic exercise as the key method of this study, along with a critical analysis of the surveys used by the Josephson Institute. Due to its wide popularity and easy accessibility, as well as its conformity to the key ideas of character education, *Character Counts!* was selected as the specific case which I would examine with the critical framework.

This brought this study to its fourth chapter, the analysis itself. I first engaged in my analysis of the Josephson Institute's surveys. This analysis involved close examination of not only the results of these surveys over the last ten years, but also of the survey script itself. It was found that the data produced by these surveys was of dubious educational value, and that they failed to support the conclusions made by the institute.

From this point I engaged in my normative analysis, focusing on five sample lessons made publicly available by the Josephson Institute. The results of this analysis showed consistent disregard for the knowledge and perspectives of students, of their reasoning and other critical faculties, and a steady emphasis on narrow forms of behaviour modification. It also indicated, among other things, that *Character Counts!* consistently failed to discuss and define the nature of the "core" values on which it relies.

The results from these two analyses, the surveys and the lesson plans, were joined in a discussion labeled, "the cycle of moral vagueness". This discussion drew a connection between the practices evident in the Josephson surveys and those suggested in the *Character Counts!* lesson plans. Put simply, I have found that both the surveys and the lesson plans are based on a worldview that fails to adequately define many of its most important elements. From vaguely discussed "core" values to the ignoring of key moral issues, these two instruments fail to clearly articulate fundamental concepts on which their use depends.

Implications for *Character Counts!*

The results of both the survey analysis and the normative analysis cast serious doubt on the appropriateness of *Character Counts!* as a program of moral education. The survey analysis problematized the data collection methods used by the authors of this program, and in so doing, problematized many of the assumptions and approaches taken by the Josephson Institute. From the lack of clear definitions for core values, to the lack of independent verification of student claims, this survey program left many issues unsettled. A researcher has no way of determining how accurate these data are, even if the questions were clearly constructed. To put is simply, it was found that the methods used by the Josephson Institute do not support the conclusions they make and, often, do not provide meaningful data for educators.

The results of the normative analysis were clear. *Character Counts!* failed to embody the key characteristics identified by my review of moral education literature. In the few instances in which the characteristics were present, serious problems arose to cast doubt on even those points of fulfillment. The lessons, for example, dealt with mutual respect in the narrowest of contexts. As opposed to teaching universal respect and dignity these lessons tended to emphasize merit or locally based respect and community. In a similar fashion, these lessons dealt with moral life highly narrowly. They consistently addressed morality in everyday life but made no attempt at acknowledging the everyday life of students and failed to include teaching that could equip them with the tools needed to cope with the ambiguity of real moral dilemmas. If the Josephson Institute holds any intent to foster reasoning, autonomy, critical understanding or any other of these highly valuable moral dispositions no evidence of such intent is present in these lessons.

From flawed methodology to narrowly constructed lessons plans *Character Counts!* simply fails to stand as a defensible set of practices for moral education and, therefore, ought not be used in its current form.

Implications for Character Education

The implications this study has for character education itself are primarily pedagogical. These results warn of several instructional weaknesses that character education may lend itself to. While this study does not enable me to make claims with respect to the weaknesses in all programs of character education, I may use these results to discuss the way in which *Character Counts!* falls prey to certain issues that arise from character education's assumptions and positions.

First and foremost, *Character Counts!* indicates that belief in universal values involves serious questions of application that may lead to inappropriately vague teaching. Since character educators typically hold that values are universally applicable, no attempt is made to discuss their interpretation. Similarly, no attempt is made to address the peculiarity of certain applications of values. This program shows that such vagueness leaves serious gaps in teaching that could possibly leave students more confused than moral.

Character Counts! also serves as a warning that character educators need to answer the question of how to provide students with meaningful involvement in their moral learning. This program consistently demonstrated a lack of concern for student contributions and previous learning. If character education is to be effective, character educators must certainly address the issue of what role students are to having in their own moral growth. Leaving them as targets of learning, rather than co-authors, is a dangerous proposition as it risks failing to engage students on a level that may effect their behavior.

Growing from this concern is the notion that such lessons must connect with students in their own terms. *Character Counts!* is a glaring example of the way in which poorly conceived character education can sound distant from the generational perspective of students. Character educators need to address how they can connect their moral lessons with the lived reality of students. This can begin by authoring more appropriate skits and examples that include dialogue more closely related to the language students currently use and situations they might find themselves in.

Such warnings and suggestions, if addressed, could greatly improve the quality of materials like those featured in *Character Counts!*. Dealing with such issues within the framework of character education is necessary if character educators hope to make their programs relevant and pedagogically sound.

In addition to identifying possible pitfalls involved in the practice of character education this study has also created a critical framework that may be used in evaluating other character education programs and moral education programs in general. The eight positive characteristics and practices discussed in this work highlight key areas that need to be dealt with in any program of moral education. While it may certainly be built upon, this framework provides a basis not only for the evaluation of such programs, but also for the comparison of programs using the eight key characteristics such programs ought to embody.

Related to this is the contribution this study has made to lesson planning in general. My analysis of *Character Counts!* has highlighted several key questions that ought to be addressed in any lesson on any subject. Teachers must, for example, have a clear conception of what role students have in their learning and what exactly they can offer the learning environment. Students have experience coming into any lesson, and such experience needs to be addressed.

The example of *Character Counts!* has also raised the question of how a teacher can relate his or her instruction to the lived reality of students. This program made no attempt to engage students in their cultural milieu. Such teaching risks irrelevance in the eyes of students with ever-evolving modes of communication and constant access to information and entertainment. Education ought to take place in the world students live in. This is, after all, the world they will use their learning in.

In the end this study provides warnings about *Character Counts!*, the difficulty of collecting data on student morality, and the difficulties that may arise in the practice of character education. This study has left readers with these cautions, and a framework with which to identify such issues in other programs and lessons.

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